Household Edition

of the Works of

Honoré de Balzac

"*The greatest of novelists . . . he has no peer yet in the English tongue.*"—Rev. Dr. Cyrus A. Barton.

Honoré de Balzac

THE HOUSEHOLD EDITION

"*He was more than moral . . . he was religious.*"—
Rev. Dr. A. H. Tuttle.

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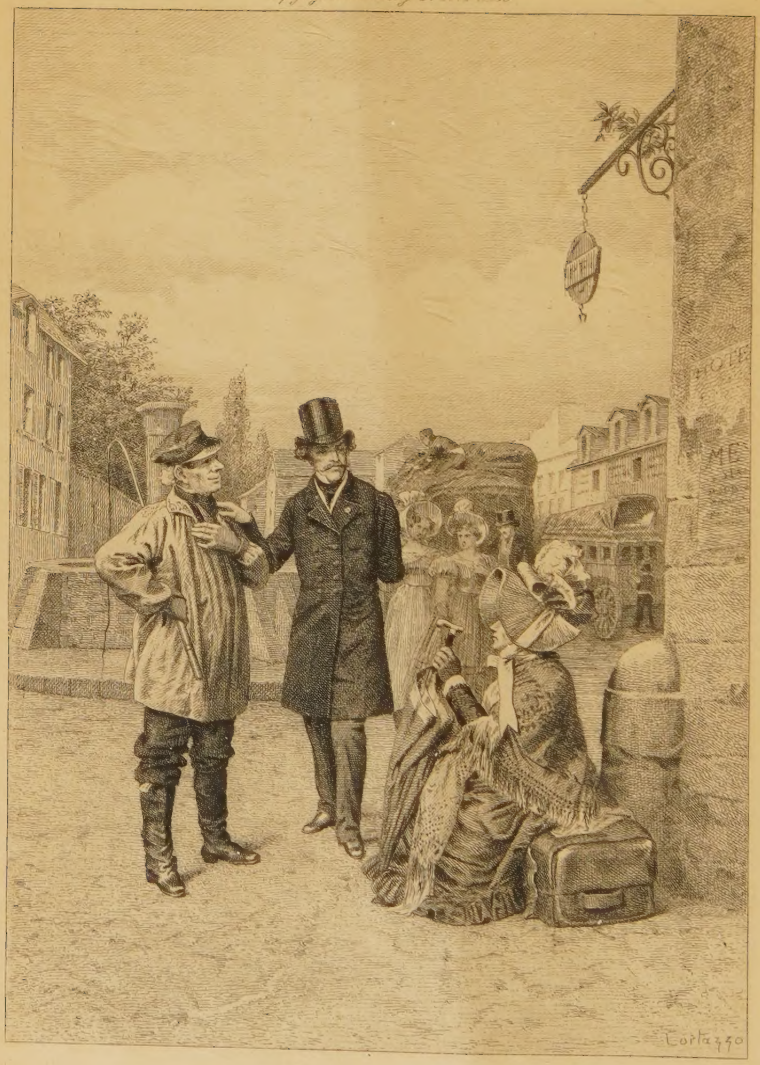

Household Edition

A START IN LIFE

MADAME FIRMIANI
THE MESSAGE
THE ATHEIST'S MASS

PHILADELPHIA
GEORGE BARRIE & SON, PUBLISHERS

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PIERROTIN PRESENTED TO MME. CLAPART

"Do we lunch there, Pierrotin?" said Oscar in a loud voice, as he slapped the carrier on the shoulder.

"I am not the driver," said Pierrotin.

"What are you, then?" Colonel Husson asked.

"The contractor," Pierrotin replied.

"Come, don't be angry with old acquaintances," said Oscar, as he pointed to his mother and without abandoning his patronizing tone. "Don't you recognize Madame Clapart?"

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THE MESSAGE
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BY

Honoré de Balzac

TRANSLATED BY

FRANCIS T. FUREY

ILLUSTRATED

AFTER PAINTINGS BY ORESTE CORTAZZO

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A START IN LIFE

TO LAURE

Let the brilliant and modest mind that inspired me with the subject of this scene have the honor of it!

Her Brother,

DE BALZAC.

TO LAURE

Let the brilliant and modest mind that inspired me with the subject of this scene have the honor of it!

Her Brother,

DE BALZAC.

A START IN LIFE

*

In a now near future the railroads must make certain industries disappear and modify some others, especially those that concern the different modes of conveyance in use in the neighborhood of Paris. And so ere long the persons and things that are the elements of this scene will make it worthy of being called a study in archæology. Will not our nephews be delighted to know the social make-up of a period that they will call the olden time? Thus the picturesque *cuckoos*—one-horse chaises—taking their stand on the Place de la Concorde, blocking up the Cours-la-Reine, cuckoos so flourishing for an age, still so numerous in 1830, no longer exist; and, on account of the more attractive rural solemnity, scarcely do we see one on the road in 1842.

In 1820 the places noted for their sites, and called environs of Paris, did not all have a regular carrier service. Yet the Touchards, father and son, had acquired a monopoly of transportation to and from the more populous towns within a radius of fifteen leagues; and their venture had built up a

magnificent establishment situated in the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis. Despite their long standing, despite their efforts, their capital and all the advantages of a powerful centralization, the Touchard conveyances found in the cuckoos of the Faubourg Saint-Denis formidable competitors for points situated seven or eight leagues round about. Such is the Parisian's fondness for the country that local ventures also competed advantageously with the Petites-Messageries, the name given to the Touchard venture in opposition to that of the Grandes-Messageries of the Rue Montmartre. At that period the Touchards' success stimulated speculators. For the smallest localities in the neighborhood of Paris there then arose ventures of fine, rapid and commodious coaches, leaving Paris and returning to it at stated times, which in all directions within a radius of ten leagues produced keen competition. Broken down in a trip of from four to six leagues, the cuckoo fell back on short distances, and survived yet a few years longer. At last it succumbed as soon as the omnibus had demonstrated the possibility of making one coach drawn by two horses hold eighteen persons. To-day the cuckoo, if, perchance, one of these birds of such difficult flight is still to be found in some coach-ripper's shop, would, on account of its structure and arrangement, be an object of learned research, comparable to that of Cuvier on the animals found in the plaster-quarries of Montmartre. The small ventures, menaced by the speculators who strove since 1822 against the

Touchards, father and son, ordinarily enlisted in their support the sympathies of those inhabiting the places which they served. Thus the venturer, at the same time conductor and owner of the coach, was an innkeeper in the locality and was familiar with its beings, things and interests. He attended to errands intelligently, he did not ask very much for his small services, and on that very account got more than the Messageries Touchard. He knew how to elude the necessity of a transportation permit. If need be, he infringed on the ordinances regarding the passengers to be carried. In fine, he had won the affection of the ordinary folk. And so, when competition was set up, if the old carrier of the country shared the week-days with it, some persons delayed their journey so as to make it in company with the antique coach-driver, though his rig and horses were in a condition that was by no means likely to inspire confidence.

One of the lines that the Touchards tried to monopolize, which was the one most disputed with them, and which is still disputed with the Toulouses, their successors, is that from Paris to Beaumont-sur-Oise, an astonishingly productive line, for three ventures worked it concurrently in 1822. In vain did the Petites-Messageries lower their prices, in vain did they increase the frequency of their departure, in vain did they build fine coaches, competition continued; so productive is a line on which are situated small towns like Saint-Denis and Saint-Brice, villages like Pierrefitte, Groslay, Écouen,

Poncelles, Moisselles, Baillet, Monsoult, Maffliers, Franconville, Presles, Nointel, Nerville, etc. The Touchard conveyances at last extended the journey from Paris to Chambly. Competition went all the way to Chambly. Now, the Toulouses go as far as Beauvais.

On this route, that to England, there is a road that leads to a place quite properly called *La Cave,* in view of its topography, and that goes through one of the most delightful valleys of the Oise basin, to the little town of L'Isle-Adam, doubly famous, both as the cradle of the extinct house of L'Isle-Adam and as the former residence of the Bourbon-Contis. L'Isle-Adam is a charming little town flanked by two large villages, that of Nogent and that of Parmain, both remarkable for splendid quarries that furnished the materials for the finest edifices of modern Paris and some abroad, for the base and ornaments of the columns of the Brussels theatre are of Nogent stone. Though remarkable for admirable sites, for famous châteaus built by princes, monks or celebrated designers, like Cassan, Stors, Le Val, Nointel, Persan, etc., in 1822 this country escaped competition and was served by two coach-drivers, who agreed to turn it to account. This exception was based on reasons easily accounted for. From La Cave, the point at which begins, on the road to England, the paved way due to the magnificence of the Conti princes, to L'Isle-Adam the distance is two leagues; no venture could make so considerable a detour, so much the more as

L'Isle-Adam was then the end of a blind alley. The road that led to it ended there. For some years past a highway has connected the Montmorency valley with the valley of L'Isle-Adam. From Saint-Denis it passes by Saint-Leu-Taverny, Méru, L'Isle-Adam, and goes as far as Beaumont, along the Oise. But in 1822 the only road that led to L'Isle-Adam was that of the Conti princes. Pierrotin and his colleague reigned, then, from Paris to L'Isle-Adam, loved by the entire country. The Pierrotin coach and that of his comrade served Stors, Le Val, Parmain, Champagne, Mours, Prérolles, Nogent, Nerville, and Maffliers. Pierrotin was so well known that the inhabitants of Monsoult, Moisselles, Baillet and Saint-Brice, though situated on the high road, made use of his coach, in which there was oftener a chance of getting a seat than in the Beaumont stages, which were always full. Pierrotin fixed it all right with his competitor. When Pierrotin was leaving L'Isle-Adam his comrade was returning from Paris, and *vice versa*. It is needless to speak of competitor, for Pierrotin had the sympathy of the country. Of the two conveyance men, he, moreover, is the only one in evidence in this veracious history. Let it, then, suffice for you to know that the two coach-drivers lived on good terms, making a friendly war on each other and disputing pleasantly for the inhabitants. For economy's sake they used at Paris the same yard, the same hotel, the same stable, the same coach-shed, the same office, the same clerk. From these

details it is plain enough that Pierrotin and his adversary were, as people say, pretty good fellows. This hotel, situated just at the angle of the Rue d'Enghien, is still there, and is called the *Lion d'Argent*. The owner of this establishment, intended from time immemorial to lodge carriers, ran a coach venture of his own to Dammartin that was so well established that the Touchards, its neighbors, whose Petites-Messageries are opposite, did not think of running a coach on this line.

Though the departures for L'Isle-Adam were to take place at a fixed time, Pierrotin and his co-carrier in this respect practised an indulgence that, if it won them the affection of the people of the country, stirred up strong remonstrances against them on the part of strangers, accustomed to the regularity of the great public establishments; but the two conductors of this coach, half stage and half cuckoo, always found defenders among their regular customers. In the afternoon the four o'clock start was delayed until half-past four, and that of the morning, though set down for eight o'clock, never took place before nine. This system, moreover, was extremely elastic. In summer, the golden season for carriers, the law as to starts, strict in regard to the unknown, was modified only in the case of people of the country. This method made it possible for Pierrotin to pocket the price of two seats for one, when an inhabitant of the country came early to ask for a seat belonging to a *bird of passage* who, unfortunately, was late. This elasticity, no doubt,

would not find favor in the eyes of purists in morality; but Pierrotin and his colleague justified it by the *hard times,* by their losses during the winter season, by the necessity of having to get better coaches soon, and, in fine, by the exact observance of the law written on bulletins, copies of which, extremely rare as they were, were given only to transient passengers obstinate enough to demand them.

Pierrotin, a man forty years old, was already the father of a family. Having left the cavalry at the time of the disbandment of 1815, this brave youth had succeeded his father, who drove, from L'Isle-Adam to Paris, a cuckoo of rather capricious appearance. After having married the daughter of a small innkeeper, he extended the L'Isle-Adam service, made it regular, and made himself be noticed for his intelligence and military exactness. Active and firm, Pierrotin—which must have been a cognomen,—by the mobility of his countenance, impressed on his red, weather-beaten face a sly expression resembling that of a wit. Nor, moreover, was he wanting in that ease of talking that is acquired by force of seeing the world and various countries. His voice, from the habit of addressing horses and crying "Look out," had become harsh; but he assumed a mild tone with the townsfolk. His costume, like that of carriers of the second order, consisted of good solid boots, heavy with nails, made at L'Isle-Adam, and trousers of coarse bottle-green velvet, and a waistcoat of like material,

but over which, while he was engaged at his work, he wore a blue blouse, the collar, shoulders and wristbands of which were adorned with many-colored embroidery. A peaked cap covered his head. Military life had left in Pierrotin's manners great respect for social superiority and the habit of obsequiousness to people of the higher classes; but if he easily made familiar with the lower middle-class folk, he always respected women, no matter to what social rank they belonged. Nevertheless, from the habit of "*trundling everybody*," to use one of his own expressions, he came at last to regard his passengers as walking packages, and as from that time requiring less care than others, the essential object of the carrying service.

Warned by the general movement that was revolutionizing his trade since peace had been restored, Pierrotin did not want to let himself be overwhelmed by the march of intelligence. And so, as soon as the fine season set in, he spoke a great deal of a certain large coach ordered from Farry, Breilmann & Co., the best of stage-coach builders, and made necessary by the growing affluence of passengers. Pierrotin's stock then consisted of two coaches. The one, which served in winter and the only one that he showed to the tax-gatherers, came down to him from his father and smacked of the cuckoo. The rounded sides of this coach allowed six travelers to be placed in it on two benches that were as hard as metal, though covered with yellow Utrecht velvet. These two benches were separated by a

wooden bar that could be taken out and replaced at will in two grooves sunk in each interior wall, just high enough to meet the back. This bar, perfidiously enveloped in velvet and which Pierrotin called a back-rest, was the bugbear of travelers on account of the difficulty that one experienced in removing and replacing it. If this back-rest was hard to handle, it was still more uncomfortable to the shoulder-blades when it was in place; but when it was left across the coach, it made entrance and exit equally dangerous, especially to women. Though each bench of this cab, with its flank curved like that of a pregnant woman, was not supposed to hold more than three passengers, yet eight were often seen there pressed as close together as herrings in a barrel. Pierrotin pretended that the passengers were the better off on this account, for they then formed a compact, immovable mass; while three travelers were perpetually bumping against one another and often ran the risk of spoiling their hats against the head of his cab, by reason of the violent joltings of the road. On the front of this coach there was a wooden bench, Pierrotin's seat, which could hold three passengers, who when perched there, as everybody knows, take the name of rabbits. On certain trips Pierrotin placed four rabbits there, and then sat himself to one side on a sort of box formed at the bottom of the body to supply a rest for his rabbits' feet, and always full of straw or packages that nothing could injure. The body of this cuckoo, painted yellow, was embellished in its

upper part with a band of wigmaker's blue on which were read in silver-white letters on the sides: *L'Isle-Adam—Paris,* and behind: *L'Isle-Adam Service.* It would be erroneous for our nephews to think of believing that this coach could convey only thirteen persons, Pierrotin included; on great occasions it sometimes admitted three more in a square compartment covered with a tilt in which were piled trunks, boxes and packages; but the prudent Pierrotin did not let anyone mount there except his regulars, and only three or four hundred paces from the barrier. These inhabitants of the *hen-roost,* a name given by drivers to this part of the coach, had to get down before reaching each village along the road at which there was a gendarme station. The overloading prohibited by the ordinances concerning the safety of passengers would then be too flagrant for the gendarme, essentially Pierrotin's friend, to be able to omit reporting this violation. Thus Pierrotin's cab carried, on certain Saturday afternoons or Monday mornings, fifteen passengers; but then to haul it he gave his big superannuated horse called Rougeot, a companion, in the shape of a horse as big as a pony, to which he gave unstinted praise. This little animal was a mare called Bichette; she ate little, she was fiery, she was indefatigable, she was worth her weight in gold.

"My wife would not give her for this big lazybones, Rougeot!" exclaimed Pierrotin when a passenger would tease him about this *extract of horse.*

The difference between the other coach and this

one consisted in the second being mounted on four wheels. This coach, of odd build, called *the four-wheeled coach,* admitted seventeen passengers, and was allowed only fourteen. It made so loud a noise that at L'Isle-Adam people often said:

"There goes Pierrotin!" as soon as he emerged from the forest that stretches along the sides of the valley. It was divided into two lobes, the first of which, called the interior, contained six passengers on two benches, and the second, a sort of cab attached in front, was called a coupé. This coupé was enclosed with inconvenient and whimsical glazing that it would take too much space to describe for it to be possible to speak of it here. The four-wheeled coach was provided with an upper deck having a canopy under which Pierrotin squeezed in six passengers and which was enclosed with leather curtains. Pierrotin sat on an almost invisible seat arranged below the glass of the coupé.

The L'Isle-Adam carrier did not pay the tax imposed on public coaches except on his cuckoo represented as holding six passengers, and he took out a permit every time that he made a trip with his four-wheeled coach. This may seem extraordinary nowadays; but in its beginnings the tax on coaches, imposed in a sort of timid way, allowed carriers those small deceits that made them quite content *to stand in with* the employees, as an expression of their vocabulary has it. Gradually the exhausted treasury became strict, it forced the coaches to stop running unless they bore the double stamp which

now announces that they are gauged and that the taxes on them have been paid. Everything has its period of innocence, even the treasury; toward the close of 1822 that period still lasted. Often in summer-time the four-wheeled coach and the cab made the trip in concert, carrying thirty-two passengers, and Pierrotin paid the toll only on six. In those good times the conveyance that left the Foubourg Saint-Denis at half-past four proudly reached L'Isle-Adam at ten o'clock in the evening. And so, boasting of his service, which called for an extraordinary hiring of horses, Pierrotin said: "We have got along nicely!" To be able to make nine leagues in five hours with this equipage, he omitted the stops that carriers make on this route at Saint-Brice, Moisselles and La Cave.

The *Lion d'Argent* hotel occupies a very deep lot. If its front has only three or four windows on the Faubourg Saint-Denis, it then allowed in its long court, at the end of which are the stables, a whole house built up against the wall of a middle property. The entrance formed, as it were, a passage, under the roof of which two or three carriages could stand. In 1822, an office for all the conveyances putting-up at the *Lion d'Argent* was kept by the innkeeper's wife, who had as many books as there were services; she took the money, wrote down the names, and kindly stored the packages in the immense kitchen of her inn. The passengers were satisfied with this patriarchal go-as-you-please. If they arrived too soon, they sat under the mantel of the

spacious fireplace, or stood under the porch, or betook themselves to the *Exchequer* café, which is at the corner of a street so named, and parallel to the Rue d'Enghien, from which it is separated only by a few houses.

In the early days of the autumn of that year, on a Saturday morning, Pierrotin, with his hand thrust through the holes of his blouse into his pockets, was standing in the gateway of the *Lion d'Argent,* whence are in view one after the other the kitchen of the inn and, beyond, the long court, at the end of which the stables are outlined in black. The Dammartin stage had just left and was lazily gliding after the Touchard stages. It was after eight o'clock in the morning. Under the enormous porch, above which one reads on a long sign-board: *Hôtel du Lion d'Argent,* the stable-boys and the porters were looking at the coaches performing that *launch* which so deceives the passenger, making him believe that the horses will always go so.

"Is it time to harness up, citizen?" said his stable-boy to Pierrotin when at last there was nothing to be seen.

"It is a quarter-past eight, and I see no passengers," Pierrotin replied. "Where, then, are they burying themselves? Hook up all the same. And with all that, no packages. Good heavens! *He* will not know where to put his passengers this evening, how fine he is doing, and as for me, I have only four enrolled! That's a pretty how-do-you-do for a Saturday! It is always like that when you

want money! What a dog's trade! What a dog of a trade!"

"And if you had them, where, then, would you put them? You have only your cab!" said the hostler, trying to calm Pierrotin.

"And my new coach, then!" Pierrotin rejoined.

"There is such a thing then?" asked the stout Auvergnat, who as he smiled showed two incisors as large as almonds.

"You old good-for-nothing! It will roll to-morrow, Sunday, and we must have eighteen passengers!"

"Ah! bless me, a fine coach, it will warm the road," said the Auvergnat.

"A coach like the one that goes to Beaumont, what! so flaming! it is painted red and gold so as to fill the Touchards with spite! I will need three horses. I've found a mate for Rougeot, and Bichette will go headlong as if shot from a bow. Come, look out, hitch up!" said Pierrotin, who was looking in the direction of the Saint-Denis gate as he crammed some tobacco into his short pipe; "I see down there a lady and a small young man with packages under their arms; they are looking for the *Lion d'Argent,* for they have turned a deaf ear to the cuckoos. Look, hold on! I seem to recognize the lady as a regular?"

"You have often arrived full after having started empty," his agent said to him.

"But no packages," Pierrotin replied. "Good heavens! what luck!"

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And Pierrotin sat down on one of the two enormous ledges that protected the base of the walls against shock from axle-trees; but he sat with a restless and dreamy air that was not habitual to him. That conversation, apparently insignificant, had stirred up cruel cares concealed at the bottom of Pierrotin's heart. And what could trouble Pierrotin's heart if it was not a fine coach? To shine on the road, to contend against the Touchards, to enlarge his service, to carry passengers who would compliment him on the conveniences due to the progress made in carriage-building, instead of having to listen to everlasting reproaches about *his drags*, such was Pierrotin's laudable ambition. Now, the L'Isle-Adam carrier, urged by his desire to get the better of his comrade, to induce him some day, perhaps, to leave to him alone the L'Isle-Adam service, had exceeded his strength. He had indeed ordered the coach from Farry, Breilmann & Co., the carriage-builders who had just substituted the square English spring for the swan-necks and other old French inventions; but these distrustful and close manufacturers would deliver this stage-coach only for spot cash. Far from being flattered at building a coach that it would be hard to dispose of if thrown on their hands, these prudent merchants undertook it only after receiving a deposit of two thousand francs from Pierrotin. To satisfy the just demand of the carriage-builders the ambitious carrier had exhausted all his resources and his entire credit. His wife, his father-in-law and his friends had

allowed him to bleed them. This superb stage-coach he had gone to see the evening before at the painter's, it now needed only to be set on wheels; but, to make it go to-morrow, he must pay for it in full.

Now, Pierrotin needed a thousand francs! In debt to the innkeeper for rent, he dared not ask him for this sum. By not having the thousand francs, he was in danger of losing the two thousand paid in advance, not to mention five hundred francs, the price of the new Rougeot, and three hundred francs for new harness on which he had got three months credit. And impelled by the rage of despair and by the folly of pride, he had just asserted that his new coach would spin to-morrow, Sunday. By giving fifteen hundred francs on two thousand five hundred, he hoped that the mollified carriage-builders would deliver the coach to him; but he cried out aloud, after meditating for three minutes:

"No, they are dogs to the end! genuine screws. If I applied to Monsieur Moreau, the manager of Presles, for he is such a good man," he said to himself as a new idea struck him, "he would perhaps take my note for six months."

At that moment an unliveried valet, loaded with a leather trunk, and coming from the Touchard establishment where he had not found a seat for the start for Chambly at one o'clock p. m., said to the carrier:

"Are you Pierrotin?"

"What then?" said Pierrotin.

"If you can wait a short quarter of an hour, you will carry my master; if not, I take his trunk back, and he will get square by taking a hackney cab."

"I'll wait two, three quarters of an hour, and to boot, my boy," said Pierrotin as he squinted at the pretty little leather trunk well strapped and fastened with a copper lock bearing a coat-of-arms.

"Well, there it is," said the valet as he unloaded the trunk from his shoulder, and Pierrotin took it up, guessed its weight and looked at it.

"Look here," said the carrier to his agent, "wrap it up in soft hay, and place it in the back boot. There's no name on it," he added.

"There are His Lordship's arms," the valet replied.

"His Lordship? More than that in gold! Come, then, and have a *nip*," said Pierrotin as he winked and went toward the *Exchequer* café, to which he led the valet. "Young man, two absinthes!" he shouted as he entered. "Who is your master, then, and where is he going to? I have never seen you," Pierrotin asked of the domestic as he touched glasses.

"There are good reasons for that," the footman rejoined. "My master doesn't go your way once a year, and he always goes there in a carriage. He prefers the Orge valley, where he has the finest park in the neighborhood of Paris, a real Versailles, a family estate, and he bears its name. Don't you know Monsieur Moreau?"

"The manager of Presles," said Pierrotin.

"Well, the comte is going to spend two days at Presles."

"Ah! I'm going to carry the Comte de Sérizy?" the carrier exclaimed.

"Yes, my boy, nothing but that. But listen! There's a watchword. If you have people of the country in your coach, do not mention the comte's name, he wants to travel incognito, and has asked me to tell you so, promising you a good fee."

"Ah! can this stealthy journey perchance have anything to do with the affair that old Léger, the Moulineaux farmer, has come to close up?"

"I don't know," replied the valet; "but there's something in the wind. Last evening I went to give orders at the stable to have the Daumont coach ready, at seven o'clock in the morning, to go to Presles. But at seven o'clock His Lordship countermanded the order. Augustin, the valet de chambre, attributes this change to the visit of a lady who appeared to him as if she had come from the country."

"Could anyone have said anything in regard to Monsieur Moreau? the best of men, the most honest of men, the king of men, what! He might have made a great deal more money than he has, if he had wanted to, come!—"

"He was wrong, then," the valet rejoined sententiously.

"Monsieur de Sérizy is at last, then, going to live at Presles, as the château has been furnished and repaired?" Pierrotin asked after a pause. "Is it

true that two hundred thousand francs have already been spent on it?"

"If we, if you or I had what has been spent over and above that, we would be of the middle-class. If the comtesse is going there, ah! bless me! the Moreaus will no longer have their privileges," the valet said with a mysterious air.

"Fine man, is Monsieur Moreau!" continued Pierrotin, who was ever thinking of asking his thousand francs of the manager, "a man who gives work, who does not bargain too much for work, and who takes all out of the land that's in it, and ever for his master! Fine man! he often comes to Paris, he always takes my coach, he gives me a good fee, and he always has a load of errands for you in Paris. It's three or four packages a day, as well for the gentleman as for the lady; in fine, a bill of fifty francs for me, for nothing but errands. If the lady is slightly inclined to think she's somebody, she dearly loves her children, it is I who go to take them from college and who take them back to it. Every time she gives me a hundred sous, a grand nabob wouldn't do better. Oh! every time that I have anyone from or to their house, I push right up to the castle gate—That's only fair, isn't it?"

"People say that Monsieur Moreau wasn't worth a thousand crowns when the comte made him manager at Presles?" said the valet.

"But since 1806, in seventeen years, this man should have made something!" Pierrotin replied.

"True, said the valet as he tossed his head. "After that, masters are rather ridiculous, and I hope for Moreau's sake that he has buttered his bread."

"I have often gone to bring you baskets of game," said Pierrotin, "to your mansion in the Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin, and I never had the luck to see either the gentleman or the lady."

"The comte is a good man," the valet said confidentially; "but if he depends on your discretion to make sure of his *cognito*, there's some squabbling ahead; at least that's what we think at the mansion; else why countermand the Daumont? why travel in a cuckoo? Has not a peer of France the means to take a livery cab?"

"A cab may cost him forty francs to go and return; for I must tell you that that road, if you do not know it, was made for squirrels. Oh! constantly getting off and on," said Pierrotin. "Peer of France or middle-class man, everybody is regarded according to his liberality! If this journey concerned Monsieur Moreau—Good heavens! wouldn't I be sorry if any misfortune befell him! Good heavens as often as you please! couldn't people find a way to prevent it? for he is a really fine man, a fine man out and out, the king of men, what!—"

"Bah! the comte is very fond of him, of Monsieur Moreau!" said the valet. "But hold, if you will let me give you some good advice: every one for himself. We have quite enough to do to mind our own business. Do what people ask you to do,

and so much the more as His Lordship is not to be fooled. Then, to say it all, the comte is generous. If you oblige him thus far," said the valet as he showed the nail of one of his fingers, "he will pay you back with something as big as that," he continued stretching out his arm.

This judicious reflection, and especially the representation, had as their effect, from a man so highly stationed as the Comte de Sérizy's second valet de chambre, the cooling of Pierrotin's zeal for the manager of the Presles estate.

"Well, adieu, Monsieur Pierrotin," said the valet.

A rapid survey of the Comte de Sérizy's life and of that of his manager is necessary here in order to understand clearly the little drama that is going to take place in the Pierrotin coach.

Monsieur Hugret de Sérizy was descended in the direct line from the famous President Hugret, ennobled in the time of Francis I.

This family *bears per pale or and sable, an orle counterchanged and two lozenges counterchanged, with:* I, SEMPER MELIUS ERIS, a device which, no less than the two dividers taken for supports, proves the modesty of middle-class families at the time when orders kept their place in the State, and the simplicity of our ancient manners by the pun on *eris*, which, combined with the I at the beginning and the final *s* of *melius*, represents the name—*Sérisy*—of the estate created an earldom.

The comte's father was first president of a parliament before the Revolution. As regards himself,

already a Councillor of State in the Grand Council, in 1787, when twenty-two years old, he attracted attention there by very excellent reports on delicate matters. He did not emigrate during the Revolution, but spent that time on his Sérizy estate, near Arpajon, where the respect that was had for his father saved him from all misfortune. After having spent some years in taking care of President de Sérizy, whom he lost in 1794, he was elected about that time to the Council of the Five-Hundred, and accepted these legislative offices as a distraction from his grief. On the 18th Brumaire Monsieur de Sérizy was, like all the old parliamentary families, an object of coquetry on the part of the First Consul, who put him in the Council of State and gave him one of the most disorganized services to reform. The scion of this historic family became one of the most active elements in the grand and magnificent organization that was due to Napoléon. And so the Councillor of State soon left his administrative office to enter the Cabinet. Made count and senator by the Emperor, he became in succession proconsul of two different kingdoms. In 1806, at the age of forty, the Senator married the sister of the former Marquis de Ronquerolles, who at twenty had become the widow of Gaubert, one of the most famous of the republican generals, and his heiress. This marriage, suitable as to nobility, doubled the already considerable fortune of the Comte de Sérizy, who became brother-in-law to the former Marquis de Rouvre, appointed count and chamberlain by the

Emperor. In 1814, worn out by constant work, Monsieur de Sérizy, whose impaired health required rest, resigned all his offices, left the government at the head of which the Emperor had placed him, and came to Paris, where Napoléon, compelled by his knowledge of what he had done, did him justice. This indefatigable master, who did not believe in fatigue in others, at first regarded that as desertion which was but the necessity in which the Comte de Sérizy found himself. Though the senator was not in disgrace, yet he passed for having reason to complain of Napoléon. And so, when the Bourbons returned, Louis XVIII., whom Monsieur de Sérizy recognized as his legitimate sovereign, showed his great confidence in the senator, who became a peer of France, by entrusting him with his private affairs, and naming him as a Minister of State. On March 20, Monsieur de Sérizy did not go to Ghent, yet notified Napoléon that he remained faithful to the house of Bourbon; he did not accept the peerage during the Hundred-Days, and spent that very short reign on his Sérizy estate. After the Emperor's second fall, he naturally became once more a member of the Privy Council, was appointed vice-president of the Council of State and was charged to liquidate, on the part of France, the indemnities demanded by the foreign powers. Without personal display, without ambition even, he had great influence in public affairs. Nothing important in politics was done without his being consulted; but he never went to Court and seldom showed

himself in his own salons. This noble life, devoted in the first place to work, at last became a continual toil. The comte arose at four o'clock in the morning all the year round, worked until noon, attended to his duties as peer of France or as vice-president of the Council of State, and went to bed at nine. In recognition of so much work, the king made him a chevalier of his orders. Monsieur de Sérizy had long worn the grand cross of the Legion of Honor; he belonged to the order of the Golden Fleece, the order of Saint Andrew of Russia, that of the Eagle of Prussia, and, in fine, to nearly all the orders of the European courts. No one was less noticed nor more useful than he in the world of politics. One understands that honors, the hubbub of favor, worldly success, were indifferent to a man of this mettle. But no one, priests excepted, reaches such a life without grave reasons. This enigmatic conduct had its word, a cruel word. In love with his wife before marrying her, in the comte this passion had resisted all the inner misfortunes of his marriage with a widow who was ever mistress of herself before as well as after her second union, and who so much the more enjoyed her liberty as Monsieur de Sérizy gave her a mother's indulgence for a spoiled child. His constant labor served him as a shield against heart sorrows buried with that care which men in politics know how to take in regard to such secrets. He understood, moreover, how ridiculous his jealousy would be in the eyes of the world, which would scarcely have believed in a

conjugal passion in an old high office-holder. Why, from the very first days of his married life, was he fascinated by his wife? Why did he suffer at first without having his revenge? Why did he no longer dare to have his revenge? Why did he let time pass, abused by hope? By what means did a young, pretty and witty wife make him a serf? The answering of all these questions would require a long history that would detract from the subject of this scene, and which, if not men, at least women will be able to see into. We may remark, however, that the comte's enormous labors and sorrows had unfortunately helped to deprive him of the advantages necessary to a man struggling against dangerous comparisons. And so the most frightful of the comte's secret misfortunes was his having justified his wife's repugnance by a malady due solely to his excess of work. Good, and even excellent toward the comtesse, he allowed her to be mistress in her own house; she received all Paris, she went to the country, she returned from it, absolutely as if she had been a widow; he watched over her estate and provided for her outlay as an overseer would have done. The comtesse held her husband in the highest esteem, she even loved his turn of mind; she knew how to make him happy by her approbation; and so she did whatever she pleased with this poor man by going and chatting with him for an hour. Like the great lords of old, the comte so well protected his wife that to make any malign insinuation in regard to her would have been to

offer him an unpardonable insult. The world greatly admired this character, and Madame de Sérizy was immensely indebted to her husband. Any other woman, even though she belonged to a family as distinguished as was that of the Ronquerolles, must have seen herself lost forever. The comtesse was very ungrateful, but charmingly so. From time to time she threw balm on the comte's wounds.

Let us now explain the subject of the Minister of State's sudden and incognito journey.

A rich farmer of Beaumont-sur-Oise, whose name was Léger, worked a farm that was entirely surrounded by and cut into the comte's estate, and which spoiled his magnificent Presles property. This farm was owned by a bourgeois of Beaumont-sur-Oise, named Margueron. The lease given to Léger in 1799, when the progress in agriculture could not be foreseen, was on the point of expiring, and the owner refused Léger's offer for a new lease. For a long time past Monsieur de Sérizy, who wanted to get rid of the cares and disputes arising from surrounded tracts, had conceived the hope of buying this farm when he learned that Monsieur Margueron's whole ambition was to have his only son, then a mere collector, appointed special receiver of finances at Senlis. Moreau called his master's attention to a dangerous adversary in the person of old Léger. The farmer, who knew at how high a price he could resell this farm to the comte, was able to give enough money to exceed the advantage that the special inducement

would offer to the younger Margueron. Two days previously the comte, urged to close up the matter, had called in his notary, Alexandre Crottat, and Derville, his lawyer, to examine the circumstances of this affair. Though Derville and Crottat threw doubt on the manager's zeal, a disturbing letter from whom had provoked this consultation, the comte defended Moreau, who, he said, had served him faithfully for seventeen years.

"Well," Derville had replied, "I advise Your Lordship to go yourself to Presles, and invite this Margueron to dinner. Crottat will send his chief clerk there, with a bill of sale all ready, leaving blank the pages or lines necessary for the description of the land or the names. In fine, let Your Excellency provide yourself, if necessary, with a part of the price in a draft on the Bank, and do not forget the son's appointment to the Senlis receivership. If you do not close at once, the farm will slip away from you! Comte, you do not know the trickery of peasants. Between peasant and diplomat, the diplomat succumbs."

Crottat backed up this advice, which, according to the valet's confidence to Pierrotin, the peer of France had no doubt taken. The evening before, the comte had sent word by the Beaumont stage to Moreau, telling him to invite Margueron to dinner so as to close up the Moulineaux affair. Before this affair the comte had ordered the Presles apartments to be restored and for a year past Monsieur Grindot, an architect in vogue, had been making a journey

thither every week. Now, while concluding his purchase, Monsieur de Sérizy wanted to examine at the same time the details and effect of the new furnishings. He counted on giving his wife a surprise when taking her to Presles, and took pride in the restoration of this château. What event had happened to make the comte, who was ostentatiously going to Presles the previous evening, want to betake himself thither incognito in Pierrotin's coach?

Here a few words on the manager's life become indispensable.

Moreau, the manager of the Presles estate, was the son of a provincial procurator, who at the Revolution became chief procurator at Versailles. In that quality the senior Moreau had almost saved the property and life of Messieurs de Sérizy, father and son. This Citizen Moreau belonged to the Danton party; Robespierre, implacable in his hate, followed him up, at last discovered him and had him put to death at Versailles. The junior Moreau, heir to his father's doctrines and friendships, became embroiled in one of the conspiracies hatched against the First Consul on his coming into power. At that time Monsieur de Sérizy, anxious to pay his debt of gratitude, got Moreau to escape in time, but the latter was condemned to death; then he asked for his pardon in 1804, obtained it, and first offered him a place in his office, and at last took him as secretary, giving him the management of his private affairs. Some time after his protector's marriage, Moreau fell in love with one of the comtesse's chambermaids

PIERROTIN AND DE SÉRIZY'S VALET

"Are you Pierrotin?"

"What then?" said Pierrotin.

"If you can wait a short quarter of an hour, you will carry my master; if not, I take his trunk back, and he will get square by taking a hackney cab."

"I'll wait two, three quarters of an hour, and to boot, my boy," said Pierrotin as he squinted at the pretty little leather trunk well strapped and fastened with a copper lock bearing a coat-of-arms.

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and married her. To escape the annoyance of the false position he was placed in by this union, more than one example of which was to be found at the Imperial Court, he asked for the management of the Presles estate, where his wife could play the lady and where, in that limited sphere, neither of them would experience any hurting of their pride. The comte needed a devoted man at Presles, for his wife preferred living on the Sérizy estate, which is only five leagues from Paris. For three or four years past Moreau had the key to his affairs, for he was intelligent; and before the Revolution he had studied pettifogging in his father's office; Monsieur de Sérizy said to him then:

"You will not make a fortune, you are ruined; but you will be happy, for I take it upon myself to make you happy."

In effect, the comte fixed a salary of a thousand crowns on Moreau, and a home in a pretty pavilion at the end of the commons; he allowed him in addition to cut so many cords of firewood, an allowance of oats, straw and hay for two horses, and rights on returns in kind. A sub-prefect is not so well off. During the first eight years of his office the manager administered Presles conscientiously; he took an interest in it. The comte, on coming there to examine the domain, to decide on what was to be purchased or to approve of work, struck by Moreau's fidelity, gave him proof of his satisfaction in ample gratuities. But when Moreau saw himself the father of a daughter, his third child, he was

so well established in all his privileges at Presles that he no longer rendered to Monsieur de Sérizy an account of so many exorbitant advantages. And so, about 1816, the manager, who until then had taken only his privileges at Presles, gladly accepted from a dealer in wood a sum of twenty-five thousand francs to conclude with him, with increase besides, a lease for the turning to account of the woods depending on the Presles estate, for twelve years. Moreau reasoned with himself: he would have nothing to fall back upon, he was the father of a family, the comte owed him this sum indeed for well nigh ten years' management; then, already the lawful possessor of sixty thousand francs savings, if he added this sum to it he could buy a farm for a hundred thousand francs in the Champagne territory, a commune situated above L'Isle-Adam, on the right bank of the Oise. Political events prevented the comte and the people of the country from remarking this investment made in Madame Moreau's name, who was supposed to have had an inheritance from an old grandaunt in her own section at Saint-Lô. As soon as the manager had tasted the delicious fruit of ownership, his conduct apparently ever remained the most irreproachable in the world; but he no longer lost a single opportunity to increase his clandestine fortune, and the interests of his three children served him as an emollient to extinguish the ardor of his probity; yet this justice should be done him, that, if he accepted bonuses, if he looked out for himself in the markets, if he insisted on his

rights so far as to abuse them, within the meaning of the Code he remained an honest man, and no proof could justify an accusation made against him. According to the jurisprudence of the least pilfering of Paris cooks, he shared between the comte and himself the profits due to his own shrewdness. This way of rounding out his fortune was a case of conscience, that was all. Active, having a good understanding of the comte's interests, Moreau with so much the greater care lay in wait for opportunities to make good acquisitions, as he always thereby got quite a big present. Presles brought a return of seventy-two thousand francs clear. And so the expression of the country for ten leagues around was: "Monsieur de Sérizy has a second self in Moreau!" Like a prudent man, from 1817 on, Moreau invested his yearly profits and salary in the Funds, still feathering his nest with the most profound secrecy. He had declined business chances, saying he had no money, and he had succeeded so well in making a poor mouth to the comte that he had obtained two wholly free scholarships for his boys in the College Henri IV. At that moment Moreau had a capital of a hundred and twenty thousand francs invested in the Consolidated Threes, since become the five per cents, and which rose from that time to eighty francs. These unknown hundred and twenty thousand francs, and his Champagne farm augmented by additions, made his fortune amount to about two hundred and eighty thousand francs, producing an income of sixteen thousand francs.

*

Such was the manager's situation at the moment when the comte wanted to buy the Moulineaux farm, the possession of which was indispensable to his tranquillity. This farm consisted of ninety-six plots of ground, bordering on, lying close to, and running along the Presles estate, and often wedged into it like checker-board spaces, without counting the party-hedges and dividing trenches, which gave rise to the most tiresome discussions about a tree to be cut down, when the ownership was found to be in dispute. Any other than a Minister of State would have had twenty lawsuits a year in regard to the Moulineaux. Old Léger wanted to buy the farm only to sell it again to the comte. In order the more surely to make the thirty or forty thousand francs, the object of his desire, the farmer had long tried to have an understanding with Moreau. Impelled by the circumstances, three days before that critical Saturday, out in the fields, old Léger had clearly demonstrated to the manager that he could place money for the Comte de Sérizy at two and a half per cent net in convenient land, that is, as usual, have the appearance of serving his master while deriving therefrom a secret profit of forty thousand francs that he offered him.

"Faith," the manager said to his wife the evening before as he was going to bed, "if I get fifty

thousand francs out of the Moulineaux affair, for the gentleman will indeed give me ten thousand of it, we will retire to L'Isle-Adam, to the Nogent pavilion."

This pavilion is a charming property built by the Prince de Conti for a lady, and on which every attention had been lavished.

"That would please me," his wife had replied to him. "The Dutchman who has come to settle there has restored it very well, and he will let us have it for thirty thousand francs, as he is compelled to return to the Indies."

"We will be only a couple of steps from Champagne," Moreau had continued. "I hope to buy the Mours farm and mill for a hundred thousand francs. We would thus have ten thousand francs income from land, one of the most delightful dwellings in the valley, only a couple of steps from our property, and there would remain to us about six thousand francs of income from the Funds."

"But why should you not ask for the position of Justice of the Peace at L'Isle-Adam? From it we would have influence and fifteen hundred francs in addition."

"Oh! I have been thinking a good deal of that."

In these circumstances, on learning that his master intended to come to Presles, that he desired him to invite Margueron to dinner on Saturday, Moreau made haste to send an express messenger, who gave to the comte's first valet de chambre a letter at too late an hour in the evening for Monsieur de Sérizy

to be able to take cognizance of it; but Augustin put it on the bureau, according to his custom in such cases. In this letter Moreau entreated the comte not to inconvenience himself and to trust in his zeal. Now, according to him, Margueron no longer wanted to sell in a lump and spoke of dividing the Moulineaux into ninety-six lots; it was necessary to get him to give up this idea, and perhaps, said the manager, to secure a secret agent.

Everybody has his enemies. Now, the manager and his wife had had a clash with a retired officer at Presles, named Monsieur de Reybert, and his wife. From tongue-lashings to pin stabs they came at last to daggers' points.

Monsieur de Reybert breathed only vengeance, he wanted to make Moreau lose his place and become his successor. These two ideas are twins. And so the manager's conduct, spied for two years, had no more secrets for the Reyberts. At the same time that Moreau was dispatching his express messenger to the Comte de Sérizy, Reybert was sending his wife to Paris. Madame de Reybert so urgently asked to speak with the comte that, sent away at nine o'clock in the evening, the time when the comte was retiring, she was introduced to His Lordship at seven o'clock next morning.

"Your Lordship," she had said to the Minister of State, "we are incapable, both my husband and myself, of writing anonymous letters. I am Madame de Reybert, my maiden name De Corroy. My husband has only six hundred francs pension

and we live at Presles, where your manager heaps insult after insult on us, though we are well-behaved people. Monsieur de Reybert, who is not an intriguer, far from it! retired as captain of artillery in 1816, after having served for twenty years, always far from the Emperor, comte! and you must know how hard it was for soldiers to advance who were not under the master's eye; having nothing to depend on but probity, Monsieur de Reybert's frankness displeased his superior officers. My husband has never ceased for three years to study your overseer with the purpose of making him lose his place. You see that we are frank. Moreau has made us his enemies, we have watched him. I have come, then, to tell you that you are made game of in the Moulineaux affair. They want to take a hundred thousand francs from you and divide it between the notary, Léger and Moreau. You have asked that Margueron be invited, you count on going to Presles to-morrow; but Margueron will play sick, and Léger is so confident of having the farm that he has come to Paris to cash his assets. If we have enlightened you, if you want an honest manager, you will take my husband; though noble, he will serve you as he served the State. Your overseer has a fortune of two hundred and fifty thousand francs, he is not to be pitied."

The comte had formally thanked Madame de Reybert, and had then given her cold comfort, for he despised informing; but on recalling all of Derville's suspicions, he was internally disturbed; then

he had suddenly noticed his manager's letter, he had read it; and in the assurances of devotedness, in the respectful reproaches that he received in reference to the distrust suggested by this desire to treat of the affair himself, he had divined the truth in regard to Moreau.

"Corruption has come with fortune, as ever!" he said to himself.

The comte had then put some questions to Madame de Reybert, less to get details than to give himself time to observe her, and he had written to his notary a few words telling him not to send his chief clerk to Presles, but to come there himself to dinner.

"If the comte," Madame de Reybert had said in closing, "has judged unfavorably of the course that I have taken, unknown to Monsieur de Reybert, he should now be convinced that we have got this information about his manager in the most natural way: the most timid conscience would find nothing in it to take back."

Madame de Reybert, *née* De Corroy, stood as erect as a picket. To the comte's hurried examination she had presented a countenance pitted by small-pox like a skimmer, a squat and dry figure, two sparkling and clear eyes, blond locks flattened down over a care-worn brow, an antiquated green sarsenet capuchin turned up like a rose, a white dress with violet spots, and rawhide shoes. The comte had recognized in her the poor captain's wife, some Puritan subscriber to the *Courrier Français*, ardent in

virtue, but sensible to the comfort of a place, and having coveted it.

"You say six hundred francs pension?" the comte had replied, answering himself instead of answering what Madame de Reybert had just related.

"Yes, comte."

"Your maiden name is De Corroy?"

"Yes, monsieur, of a noble family of the Messin country, my husband's country."

"In what regiment did Monsieur de Reybert serve?"

"In the seventh regiment of artillery."

"Good!" the comte had answered as he wrote down the number of the regiment.

He had thought he would be able to give the management of his estate to a former officer, in regard to whom he would obtain from the Ministry of War the most exact information.

"Madame," he had continued as he rang for his valet de chambre, "return to Presles with my notary, who will find the way of getting there in time for dinner, and to whom I have recommended you; here is his address. I am going myself secretly to Presles, and will send word to Monsieur de Reybert to come and speak with me—"

Thus the news of Monsieur de Sérizy's journey by public coach and the recommendation to keep silent regarding the comte's name were not a false alarm to the carrier, who had a presentiment of the danger about to fall on one of his best customers.

As he left the *Exchequer* café, Pierrotin noticed at the door of the *Lion d'Argent* the woman and the young man whom his perspicacity had pointed out to him as customers; for the lady, with her neck stretched and an anxious expression on her countenance, was evidently looking for him. This lady, clad in a re-dyed black silk gown, a bonnet of Carmelite color and an old French cashmere, with floss-silk stockings and goat-skin shoes, held in her hand a straw market-basket and a royal-blue umbrella. This woman, formerly pretty, looked about forty years old; but her blue eyes, devoid of the brightness that happiness gives, told that she had long since given up the world. And so her attire, as well as her shape, indicated a mother entirely devoted to her housekeeping and to her son. If her bonnet-strings were faded, their style dated from over three years back. Her shawl was fastened with a broken needle, converted into a pin by means of a head of sealing-wax. The unknown woman waited impatiently for Pierrotin so as to recommend to him that son, who no doubt was traveling alone for the first time, and whom she had accompanied as far as the coach, as much from distrust as from maternal love. This mother was in a certain sense completed by her son; so that without the mother the son would not have been so well understood. If the mother stinted herself to exhibiting mended gloves, the son wore an olive overcoat the sleeves of which, rather short at the wrist, told that he was still growing, like adults of eighteen or nineteen. His blue

trousers, mended by his mother, showed to the eye a new seat when the overcoat by mischance became open at the back.

"Don't fidget with your gloves so, you will spoil them too quickly," she said when Pierrotin appeared. "You are the conductor—Ah! but it's you, Pierrotin?" she continued as she left her son for a moment and took the coach-driver a couple of steps away.

"That's all right, Madame Clapart?" replied the carrier, whose countenance wore an expression that bespoke respect and familiarity at the same time.

"Yes, Pierrotin. Be very careful of my Oscar, he is going alone for the first time."

"Oh! if he is going alone to Monsieur Moreau's—" the coach-driver called out so as to know whether the young man was going there indeed.

"Yes," the mother replied.

"Madame Moreau is quite willing, then?" Pierrotin continued in a rather sly way.

"Alas!" said the mother, "it will not be all rosy for him, poor child; but his future imperatively demands this journey."

This answer struck Pierrotin, who hesitated to confide his fears regarding the manager to Madame Clapart, just as she dared not injure her son by making to Pierrotin certain recommendations that would have changed the conductor into a mentor. During this mutual deliberation, which was betrayed by some expressions about the weather, the road, and the stopping-places on the journey, it may

not be amiss to explain what bonds connected Pierrotin with Madame Clapart and authorized the few confidential words that they had just exchanged. Frequently, that is to say, three or four times a month, Pierrotin found at La Cave, on his way when he was going to Paris, the manager giving a signal to a gardener as he saw the coach coming. The gardener then assisted Pierrotin to load one or two baskets full of fruit or vegetables according to the season, chickens, eggs, butter, game. The manager always paid Pierrotin the freight, giving him the money necessary to meet the toll at the gate, if the shipment contained articles subject to duty. Never did these hampers, game-baskets and packages have an address on them. A first time, which had served for all, the manager had given by word of mouth Madame Clapart's residence to the discreet coach-driver, entreating him never to confide this precious message to others. Pierrotin, thinking of an intrigue between some charming girl and the manager, had gone to No. 7, Rue de la Cerisaie, in the Arsenal quarter, where he had seen Madame Clapart, whose picture we have just drawn, instead of the young and pretty creature whom he expected to find there. Carriers are called upon by their office to penetrate into many interiors and into quite a number of secrets;—but social chance, that sub-Providence, having willed that they be devoid of education or innocent of the talent of taking notice, it follows that they are not dangerous. Nevertheless, after a few months, Pierrotin knew

not how to explain the relations between Madame Clapart and Monsieur Moreau, from what he was allowed to see into in the Rue de la Cerisaie household. Though rents were not high at that time in the Arsenal quarter, Madame Clapart was lodged on the fourth floor, at the end of a court, in a house that formerly had been the mansion of some great lord, at the time when the higher nobility of the kingdom dwelt on the former site of the Palais des Tournelles and the Hôtel Saint-Paul. Towards the end of the sixteenth century great families divided between them these vast spaces, occupied of old by the gardens of the palace of our kings, as is indicated by the names of the Rue de la Cerisaie, Beautreillis, des Lions, etc. This tenement, all the rooms of which were finished in antique woodwork, was made up of three rooms in a row, a dining-room, a salon and a bedroom. Overhead were a kitchen and Oscar's room. Opposite the front door, on what in Paris is called the square, was seen the door of a side room, arranged on each floor in a sort of building that also contained the shaft of a wooden stairway, and which formed a square tower built of large stones. This room was that of Moreau when he slept in Paris. Pierrotin had seen in the first room, where he laid down the game-baskets, six straw-seated walnut chairs, a table and a sideboard; six windows with small red curtains. Later on, when he entered the salon, he remarked there some old furniture of the time of the Empire, but out of date. Besides, there was to be found in

this salon only the furniture required by the landlord to answer for the rent. Pierrotin formed his opinion of the bedroom from the salon and dining-room. The woodwork, set off by rough painting of a whitish red, made the mouldings, designs and *figurines* clammy, and far from being an ornament, saddened the eye. The floor, which had never been waxed, was of a grayish hue, like boarding-school floors. When the coach-driver took Monsieur and Madame Clapart by surprise at table, their plates, glasses and smallest articles betrayed frightful pinching; yet they made use of silver covers; but the dishes and soup tureen, chipped and mended as are the plates and dishes of the poor, inspired pity. Monsieur Clapart, clad in a mean little overcoat, with ignoble slippers on his feet, always wearing green spectacles, displayed, as he removed a terrible-looking object of a cap that was five years old, a pointed skull from the top of which fell straggling and dirty filaments that a poet would have refused to call hair. This wan-complexioned man seemed timid and must have been tyrannical. In this sorry tenement, situated on the north, without any view but that of a vine spread out on the opposite wall, of a well in the corner of the court, Madame Clapart took on the airs of a queen and walked as a woman who knew not how to go on foot. Frequently, as she thanked Pierrotin, she cast glances at him that would have softened an observant man; from time to time she slipped twelve sou-pieces into his hand. Her voice was charming. Pierrotin did

not know this Oscar, for the reason that the boy was leaving college and that he had never met him at home.

This is the sad story that Pierrotin would never have seen into, even, as he had been doing for some time past, by asking information of the portress; for this woman knew nothing, unless it was that the Claparts paid two hundred and fifty francs rent, had only one house-servant for a few hours in the morning, that Madame sometimes made some little soap-suds herself, and every day paid the charges on letters, not appearing in a condition to let them accumulate.

There does not exist, or rather there rarely exists, a criminal that is wholly a criminal. With more reason would it be hard for one to find compact dishonesty. One may keep his employer's accounts to his own advantage, or take from the crib as much straw as possible for one's self; but while massing up for one's self a capital in ways more or less allowable, there are few men who do not perform some good acts. Were it only from curiosity or from pride, by way of contrast, perchance, every man has had his moment of beneficence; he calls it his error and does not begin over again; but he sacrifices to Goodness, as the most surly sacrifices to the Graces, once or twice in a lifetime. If Moreau's faults can be excused, will it not be by his persistence in aiding a poor woman whose good graces had formerly made him proud and at whose house he concealed himself during his

dangers? This woman, famous under the Directory by her intrigues with one of the five kings of the moment, married, through that omnipotent protection, a purveyor who made millions, and whom Napoléon ruined in 1802. This man, whose name was Husson, lost his reason by his sudden transition from opulence to penury, and threw himself into the Seine, leaving the pretty Madame Husson pregnant. Moreau, very intimately associated with Madame Husson, was then under sentence of death; accordingly he could not marry the purveyor's widow, he was even obliged to leave France for a short time. Twenty-two years old, Madame Husson in her distress married a clerk named Clapart, a young man of twenty-seven, who, as the saying is, had hopes. God save women from handsome men who have hopes! At that period government clerks very readily became people of importance, for the Emperor was looking for capacities. But Clapart, favored with a vulgar beauty, had no intellect. Believing Madame Husson to be very rich, he had feigned a strong passion for her; she was in the position of not meeting, either in the present or in the future, the obligations she had contracted in her days of opulence. Clapart rather unsatisfactorily filled a place in the Finance bureau that brought no more than eighteen hundred francs salary. When Moreau, on his return to the Comte de Sérizy's, learned of the horrible situation in which Madame Husson was placed, he was able, before getting married, to secure her a situation as first chambermaid

with MADAME, the Emperor's mother. In spite of this powerful protection, Clapart was never able to advance, his nullity was too readily noticeable. Ruined in 1815 by the Emperor's fall, the brilliant Aspasia of the Directory remained without any other resources than a position at twelve hundred francs salary that was secured for Clapart, through the influence of the Comte de Sérizy, in the offices of the City of Paris. Moreau, the only protector of this woman whom he had known to be worth several millions, obtained for Oscar Husson one of the half-scholarships of the City of Paris in the College Henry IV., and he sent through Pierrotin, to the Rue de la Cerisaie, all that could decently be offered to aid a household in distress. Oscar was the whole future, the entire life, of his mother. The only fault with which this poor woman can be reproached is the exaggeration of her tenderness for this child, the stepfather's bugbear. Oscar was unfortunately endowed with a dose of folly that was not suspected by his mother, in spite of Clapart's epigrams. This stupidity, or, to speak more correctly, this arrogance, so disturbed the manager that he had entreated Madame Clapart to send this young man to him for a month, so that he could study him and judge to what career he was best adapted; Moreau thought of one day presenting Oscar to the comte as his successor. But, to give the devil exactly his due and God what belongs to Him, perhaps it is not amiss to state the causes of Oscar's stupid pride, by remarking that he was born in the

house of MADAME, the Emperor's mother. During his early childhood his eyes were dazzled by the Imperial splendors. His flexible imagination must have preserved the impressions of those astounding tableaux, kept an image of that golden and festive time, with the hope of finding it again. The buoyancy natural to collegians, all possessed of the desire of outshining one another, resting on those memories of childhood, had developed beyond measure. Perhaps also the mother recalled in her home, with a little too much complaisance, the days when she was one of the queens of Directorial Paris. In fine, Oscar, who had just finished his classes, had had perhaps to repel in college the humiliations that paying pupils heap at every opportunity on sizars, when sizars do not know how to impress a certain amount of respect on them by superior physical force. This mingling of extinct former splendor, of vanished beauty, of tenderness accepting misery, of hope in this son, of maternal blindness, of sufferings heroically borne, made of this woman one of those sublime figures which in Paris court the observer's gaze.

Incapable of seeing into Moreau's great attachment to this woman, or that of this woman to her protégé of 1797, become her only friend, Pierrotin did not want to communicate the suspicion that was passing through his head regarding the danger incurred by Moreau. The terrible "We have enough to do to mind our own business!" spoken by the valet de chambre recurred to the coach-driver's

heart, as does the feeling of obedience to those whom he called *the front rank.* Moreover, at that moment Pierrotin felt as many points in his head as there are hundred-sou pieces in a thousand francs! A trip of seven leagues no doubt seemed like a long journey to the imagination of that poor mother who, in her life of elegance, had rarely passed the barriers; for these words: "Well, madame! Yes, madame!" repeated by Pierrotin, told clearly enough that the coach-driver desired to be relieved of recommendations that were evidently too verbose and useless.

"You will place the packages so that they will not get wet in case the weather changes?"

"I have a tilt," said Pierrotin. "Besides, look here, see, madame, with what care they are put on?"

"Oscar, do not remain more than a fortnight, no matter how they insist on your staying," continued Madame Clapart as she returned to her son. "No matter what you do, you will not be able to please Madame Moreau; moreover, you ought to be back for the end of September. You know we must go to Belleville, to your uncle Cardot's."

"Yes, mamma."

"Especially," she said to him in a low voice, "never speak of domestic affairs—Keep constantly in mind that Madame Moreau was a chambermaid—"

"Yes, mamma—"

Oscar, like all young people in whom pride is excessively developed, seemed out of sorts at seeing

himself thus admonished on the threshold of the *Lion d'Argent* hotel.

"Well, adieu, mamma; they are going to start, see, the horse is harnessed."

The mother, forgetting that she was in the heart of the Faubourg Saint-Denis, embraced her Oscar, and said to him as she took a nice little loaf from her basket:

"Hold, you were going to forget your little loaf and your chocolate! My child, I warn you again to take nothing at the inns, they always charge ten prices for the least things there."

Oscar would have wished to see his mother afar off when she thrust the loaf and the chocolate into his pocket. There were two witnesses to this scene, two young men some years older than the boy just from college, better dressed than he, who had come without their mother, and whose walk, toilet and airs betrayed that complete independence, the object of all the desires of a boy still under his mother's immediate yoke. These two young men were then the whole world to Oscar.

"He said *mamma,*" one of the two unknown ones exclaimed, laughing.

This word reached Oscar's ear and made him utter an "Adieu, mother!" spoken in a tone of terrible impatience.

Let us acknowledge it: Madame Clapart spoke a little too loud and seemed to let the passers-by into the confidence of her tenderness.

"What ails you, then, Oscar?" this poor hurt mother asked. "I can't understand you," she continued in a severe tone, believing herself capable—an error of all mothers who spoil their children—of imposing respect on him. "Listen, my Oscar," she said, at once assuming her tender voice, "you have a propensity to talk, to tell all that you know and all that you do not know, and that out of bravado, from a young man's stupid pride; I repeat to you, be careful to keep your tongue in check. You are not yet far enough advanced in life, my dear treasure, to judge of people whom you are going to meet, and there is nothing more dangerous than to chat in public coaches. In a stage-coach, moreover, the right kind of people keep still."

The two young men, who no doubt had gone to the lower end of the establishment, were again making the noise of their boot-heels heard under the gateway: they might have heard this lecture; and so, in order to get rid of his mother, Oscar had recourse to heroic means, which proves how pride stimulates the intellect.

"Mamma," he said, "you are here in a draught, you may get a severe cold; and, besides, I am going to get into the coach."

The boy had touched some tender spot, for his mother laid hold of him, embraced him as though he were taking a long journey, and escorted him to the cab, showing tears in her eyes.

"Do not forget to give five francs to the servants," she said. "Write to me three times at

least within a fortnight! behave properly, and be mindful of all my recommendations. You have enough linen not to get any of it washed. In fine, ever remember Monsieur Moreau's acts of kindness, listen to him as to a father, and faithfully follow his advice—"

As he got into the cab Oscar showed his blue stockings in consequence of his trousers being suddenly raised up, and the new seat of his trousers by reason of the opening of his overcoat. And so the smile on the lips of the two young men, whom these traces of honorable mediocrity did not escape, inflicted a fresh wound on the young man's pride.

"Oscar has secured the first seat," said the mother to Pierrotin. "Sit at the end," she continued, always looking tenderly at Oscar and lovingly smiling on him.

Oh! how Oscar regretted that misfortune and sorrow had tarnished his mother's beauty, that poverty and devotedness kept her from being better clad! One of the two young men, he who wore boots and spurs, gave the other a nudge of his elbow to call his attention to Oscar's mother, and the other turned up his moustache by a movement that meant: "A pretty figure!"

"How will I get rid of my mother?" said Oscar to himself as he assumed an anxious air.

"What ails you?" Madame Clapart asked him.

Oscar pretended not to have heard, the monster! Perhaps on that occasion Madame Clapart lacked in tact; but absolute feelings are so egoistic!

"Georges, do you like children on a journey?" the young man asked of his friend.

"Yes, if they are weaned, if they are called Oscar, and if they have chocolate, my dear Amaury."

These two phrases were exchanged in an undertone so as to leave Oscar free to hear or not; his countenance was going to indicate to the traveler the measure of what he might try against the boy by way of pleasantry during the journey. Oscar did not want to hear. He looked around to know whether his mother, who weighed on him like a nightmare, was still there, for he knew that she loved him too much to leave him so soon. Not only did he involuntarily compare his traveling companion's dress with his own, but he also felt that his mother's toilet counted for much in the mocking smile of the two young men.

"If they could only leave, they!" he said to himself.

Alas! Amaury had just said to Georges, as he gave the cab wheel a slight rap with his cane:

"And you are going to trust your future to that frail bark?"

"I must!" said Georges with an air of resignation.

Oscar heaved a sigh as he remarked the cavalier manner of the hat set over the ear as if to show a magnificent head of hair well frizzed; while he, by his step-father's orders, had his black hair cut like a brush in front and close, like that of a soldier.

The vain youth presented a round and chubby countenance, lit up by the colors of robust health; while his traveling companion's was long, finely formed and pale. This young man's forehead was broad, and his model chest filled a waistcoat of cashmere make. While admiring a close-fitting iron-gray pair of trousers, an overcoat with frogs and olives, fitting close to the form, it seemed to Oscar that this unknown, romantic young man, endowed with so many advantages, was abusing his superiority over him, just as an ugly woman is hurt by the mere appearance of a pretty woman. The noise made by the iron boot-heels, which the unknown one made clink a little too loud to please Oscar, resounded even to his heart. In fine, Oscar was as embarrassed by his clothes, perhaps home-made and cut out of his step-father's old clothes, as this envied youth was comfortable in his.

"That chap there, must have some money in his fob," thought Oscar.

The young man turned round. What must Oscar have thought of himself as he noticed a gold chain passed around the neck and at the end of which no doubt was a gold watch! This unknown one then assumed in Oscar's eyes the proportions of a somebody.

Brought up in the Rue de la Cerisaie since 1815, taken to and brought back from college on free days by his father, Oscar had no other points of comparison, since reaching the age of puberty, than his mother's poor household. Kept strictly in bounds

In accordance with Moreau's advice, he did not often go to the theatre, and he did not rise any higher than than the Ambigu-Comique, where his eyes did not perceive much elegance. It, indeed, the attention that a child gives to the melodrama allows him to examine the hall. His step-father, as was the custom in the time of the Empire, still wore his watch in his fob, and hanging down over his abdomen was a heavy gold chain, at the end of which was a package of odd trinkets, seals, and a key with a round and flat head, on which was a country scene in mosaic. Oscar, who regarded this old luxury as a *ne plus ultra*, was astounded, then, at this revelation of a superior and matter-of-fact elegance. This young man abusively displayed finely-finished gloves, and seemed to waist to dazzle Oscar's eyes by gracefully dangling before him an elegant gold-headed cane. Oscar was approaching that last quarter of adolescence when small things give great joy and cause great misery, when one prefers a misfortune to a ridiculous toilet, when pride, while not bothering itself with the great interests of life, takes to trivialities, dress, and the desire of appearing to be a man. One then exaggerates his importance, and brag is so much the more exorbitant as it is exercised on nothings; but, if one is jealous of an elegantly clad dandy, one is also enthusiastic for talent, one admires the man of genius. These faults, when they have no roots in the heart, bespeak exuberance of spirits and a fertile imagination. That a youth of nineteen, an only son, kept strictly

under the paternal roof because of the indigence afflicting an employé at twelve hundred francs salary, but adored and for whom his mother imposes severe privations on herself, marvels at a young man of twenty-two, envies him his frogged polonaise lined with silk, his imitation cashmere vest and cravat passed through a ring of bad taste—are not these peccadillos committed in all ranks of society, by the inferior who is jealous of his superior? The man of genius himself obeys this first passion. Did not Rousseau of Geneva admire Venture and Bade? But Oscar passed from peccadillo to fault, he felt humiliated, he took a dislike to his traveling companion, and there arose in his heart a secret desire to prove to him that he was just as good as he was. The two fine young men were ever sauntering from the gate to the stables, from the stables to the gate, and going as far as the street; and when they turned round they always looked at Oscar, who was crouching in his corner. Oscar, persuaded that the chucklings of the two young men concerned him, affected the most profound indifference. He took to humming the refrain of a song then set in vogue by the Liberals, and which said "*'Tis Voltaire who's to blame, 'tis Rousseau who's to blame.*" This attitude no doubt led to his being taken for a lawyer's junior clerk.

"See here, maybe he's in the Opera chorus," said Amaury.

Exasperated, Oscar jumped up, raised the slide and said to Pierrotin:

"When are we going to start?"

"In a jiffy," replied the carrier, who held his whip in his hand and was looking in the direction of the Rue d'Enghien.

At that moment the scene was enlivened by the arrival of a young man accompanied by a genuine gamin, who made their appearance followed by a factotum dragging a car with the aid of a breast-strap. The young man came to speak confidentially to Pierrotin, who tossed his head and began to hail his agent. The agent ran to assist in unloading the little car, which contained, besides two trunks, buckets, brushes, boxes of strange forms, an infinite number of packages and utensils, which the younger of the two new passengers, mounted on the top, placed there, and packed in there with so much celerity that poor Oscar, smiling at his mother then on guard at the other side of the street, saw none of these utensils that might have revealed the profession of these new traveling companions. The gamin, about sixteen years old, wore a gray blouse fastened by a varnished leather belt. His cap, like a skull-cap swaggeringly placed on his head, bespoke a bantering character, as did the picturesque disorder of his curly brown hair that spread over his shoulders. His black taffeta cravat outlined a very white neck, and brought out more clearly the vivacity of his gray eyes. The animation of his brown-colored face, the curve of his rather strong lips, his ears standing out, his turned-up nose, all the details of his physiognomy betokened the jeering mind of

Figaro, the thoughtlessness of youth; like the vivacity of his actions, his bantering look revealed an intellect already developed by the practice of a profession that he had embraced early in life. As if he had already some moral value, this youth, become a man by art or vocation, appeared indifferent to the question of costume, for he looked at his unpolished shoes with the air of poking fun at them, and his ordinary ticking trousers as if he were looking for stains on them, less to remove them than to see their effect.

"I'm quite high-toned!" he said as he flung himself aside and addressed his companion.

That man's look betrayed authority over this adept in whom an experienced eye would have detected that joyous pupil in painting who in workshop style is called a *grinder*.

"Have some style about you, Mistigris!" replied the master as he gave him the surname which no doubt the workshop had imposed upon him.

This passenger was a thin and pale young man, with extremely abundant black hair, in quite fantastic disorder; but this abundant hair seemed necessary to an enormous head whose vast forehead bespoke a precocious intellect. The troubled countenance, too original to be ugly, was furrowed as if this singular young man was suffering, either from a chronic malady or from privations imposed by poverty, which is a terrible chronic malady, or from sorrow too recent to be forgotten. His dress, almost like that of Mistigris, every proportion being

observed, consisted of a mean, well-worn overcoat, but clean, well-brushed, of American green color; a black waistcoat buttoned up very high, like the overcoat, and which scarcely allowed one to see a red silk handkerchief around his neck. Black trousers, as badly worn out as the overcoat, flopped about his thin legs. In fine, dirty boots indicated that he had come on foot and from afar. By a rapid glance this artist took in the depths of the *Lion d'Argent*, the stables, the different windows, the details, and he looked at Mistigris, who had imitated him by an ironical glance.

"Pretty!" said Mistigris.

"Yes, it is pretty," the unknown man repeated.

"We have arrived too soon after all," said Mistigris. "Couldn't we crunch *some* vegetable or other! My stomach is like nature, it abhors a vacuum!"

"Can we go and have a cup of coffee?" the young man asked Pierrotin in a mild voice.

"Don't be long," said Pierrotin.

"Good! we have a quarter of an hour," Mistigris replied, thus betraying the genius for observation that is innate in the Paris grinders.

These two travelers disappeared. Nine o'clock then struck in the hotel kitchen. Georges thought it just and reasonable to apostrophize Pierrotin.

"Well, my friend, when one enjoys a conditional skid like that," he said as he tapped his cane on the wheel, "one should at least assume the merit of punctuality. The devil! one does not get himself inside there for comfort, one must have devilish

pressing business to entrust his bones to it. Then this jade, that you call Rougeot, will never make up the lost time for us."

"We are going to yoke Bichette while these two passengers are having their coffee," Pierrotin replied. "Go, then, you," he said to the agent, "and see if old Léger wants to come with us—"

"And where is he, this old Léger?" asked Georges.

"Opposite, at No. 50. He has not found a seat in the Beaumont coach," said Pierrotin to his agent without answering Georges and disappearing to go and get Bichette.

Georges, whose hand his friend pressed, got into the coach, first flinging into it, with an air of importance, a large portfolio that he placed under the cushion. He took the corner opposite to that which Oscar filled.

"This old Léger makes me uneasy," he said.

"No one can take our seats from us, I have No. 1," Oscar replied.

"And I, 2," replied Georges.

At the same time as Pierrotin appeared with Bichette, the agent came in view, bringing in tow a stout man weighing at least two hundred and sixty-five pounds. Old Léger belonged to the species of farmers, with a huge paunch, square back, powdered wig, and wearing a small overcoat of blue linen-cloth. His white gaiters, reaching above the knee, there hugged striped velvet breeches, fastened by silver buckles. His hob-nailed shoes weighed

two pounds each. Finally, he held in his hand a small reddish and dry stick, polished, with a thick end, and attached by a leather cord around his wrist.

"Your name is old man Léger?" Georges said seriously when the farmer tried to put one of his feet on the step.

"At your service," said the farmer, as he showed a countenance resembling that of Louis XVIII., with strong rubicund jowls, from between which peeped a nose that on any other face would have seemed enormous. His laughing eyes were pressed by cushions of fat.

"Come, a bold stroke, my boy," said he to Pierrotin.

The farmer was hoisted in by the agent and the carrier to the cry of "Houp la! ahé! hisse!—" uttered by Georges.

"Oh! I'm not going far, I'm going only as far as La Cave," said the farmer, answering one pleasantry with another.

In France everybody understands pleasantry.

"Set yourself at the end," said Pierrotin, "you are going to be six."

"And your other horse?" asked Georges; "is he as fanciful as *a third* post horse?"

"There, city swell," said Pierrotin, as he pointed with a gesture to the little mare coming all alone.

"He calls that insect a horse," retorted Georges, astonished.

"Oh! he's a good one, that little horse is," said the farmer, who was now seated. "We're safe, gentlemen. Are we going to weigh anchor, Pierrotin?"

"I have two passengers who are taking their cup of coffee," the coach-driver replied.

The young man with the wrinkled face and his grinder then made their appearance.

"Let's start!" was the general cry.

"We are going to start," Pierrotin replied. "Come, let us weigh anchor," he said to the agent, who removed the stones that blocked the wheels.

The carrier took Rougeot's reins, and uttered that guttural cry of "Kit! kit!" to tell the two beasts to gather up their strength, and, though evidently bedulled, they pulled the coach, which Pierrotin drew up in front of the *Lion d'Argent* gate. After this purely preparatory manœuvre, he looked along the Rue d'Enghien and disappeared, leaving his coach in the agent's charge.

"Well, is he subject to those attacks, that city man of yours?" Mistigris asked of the agent.

"He has gone to take his oats back to the stable," replied the Auvergnat, up to all the tricks that are used to try the passengers' patience.

"After all," said Mistigris, "Experience is a great *faster*."

At that time the mangling of proverbs was in vogue in painters' shops. It was a triumph to find a change of a few letters or of an almost similar

word that lent to the proverb a whimsical or ridiculous meaning.

"Paris was not built in a *bay*," replied the master.

Pierrotin returned bringing the Comte de Sérizy, coming by way of the Rue de l'Échiquier, and with whom no doubt he had had a few minutes' conversation.

"Old man Léger, will you give your place to Monsieur le Comte? My coach would be more evenly loaded."

"And we will not start for an hour yet, if you continue," said Georges. "It is going to be necessary to remove this infernal bar that it was so hard to put in place, and everybody will have to get out for a passenger who comes last. Each one has a right to the seat that he has taken. What is the gentleman's? Let's see! call the roll! Have you a ticket? Have you a register? What is Monsieur le Comte's place, *comte* of what?"

"Monsieur le Comte—," said Pierrotin, visibly embarrassed, "you will be rather uncomfortable."

"You didn't know your *comte*, then?" Mistigris asked. "Short *beckonings* make long friends."

"Mistigris, keep on your behavior!" gravely exclaimed his master.

Monsieur de Sérizy was evidently taken by all the passengers for a middle-class man whose name was Lecomte.

"Do not disturb anyone," said the count to Pierrotin, "I will sit beside you on the front."

"Come, Mistigris," said the young man to the grinder, "remember the respect you owe to old age, you do not know how fearfully old you may become yourself: 'Traveling instructs *truth.*' So give up your seat to the gentleman."

Mistigris opened the front of the cab and jumped up with the agility of a frog bounding into the water.

"You cannot be a rabbit, venerable old man," said he to Monsieur de Sérizy.

"Mistigris, *art is the friend of man,*" his master replied to him.

"Thank you, sir," said the count to Mistigris's master, who thus became his neighbor.

And the statesman cast at the lower end of the coach a sagacious glance that greatly offended Oscar and Georges.

"We are an hour and a quarter late," said Oscar.

"When one wants to be master of a coach, one reserves all its seats," Georges observed.

Henceforward, sure of his incognito, the Comte de Sérizy made no answer to these remarks, and assumed the air of a good-natured bourgeois.

"Suppose you were late, wouldn't you be very glad that one had waited for you?" said the farmer to the two young men.

Pierrotin looked towards the Saint-Denis gate, holding his whip, and he hesitated to mount on the hard bench where Mistigris was fidgeting.

"If you are waiting for anyone," the count then said, "I am not the last."

"I approve of that reasoning," said Mistigris.

Georges and Oscar started laughing rather insolently.

"The old man is not strong," said Georges to Oscar, whom this apparent attachment to Georges delighted.

When Pierrotin was seated to the right on his bench, he leaned so as to look backwards, but could not find in the crowd the two passengers he needed to make a full load.

"Zounds! two more passengers wouldn't go badly with me."

"I haven't paid, I'll get out," said Georges, frightened.

"And whom are you waiting for, Pierrotin?" said old Léger.

Pierrotin called out a certain *Hi!* in which Bichette and Rougeot recognized a final resolve, and the two horses bounded forth toward the ascent of the faubourg at an accelerated pace that was soon to be slackened.

The count had an entirely red face, but of a bright red still further heightened by some inflamed portions, and which his absolutely white hair brought out in relief. To other than young folks this tint would have revealed the constant inflammation of the blood produced by excessive work. These buds so injured the count's noble appearance that a close examination was necessary to find in his green eyes the shrewdness of the magistrate, the depth of the politician, and the knowledge of the legislator. The face was flat,

the nose seemed to have been depressed. The hat concealed the grace and beauty of the forehead. In fine, there was something to make that care-free youth laugh in the odd contrast of silver-white hair with heavy tufted eyebrows that remained black. The count, who wore a long blue overcoat buttoned to the throat, in military fashion, had a white cravat around his neck, cotton in his ears, and a rather ample shirt-collar sufficiently high to outline a white square on each cheek. His black trousers enveloped his boots, the toes of which could scarcely be seen. He had no decoration in his buttonhole; his doe-skin gloves concealed his hands. Certainly, to young folks nothing betrayed in this man a peer of France, one of the men most useful to the country. Old Léger had never seen the count, who, on his part, knew him only by name. If the count, on getting into the coach, cast on it the searching glance that had just shocked Oscar and Georges, he was looking there for his notary's clerk so as to ask him to observe the most profound silence, in case he should, like himself, have to take the Pierrotin coach; but, reassured by Oscar's attitude, by that of old Léger, and especially by the quasi-military air, the mustaches and mannerisms of a gentleman who lives by his wits, that distinguished Georges, he thought that his note had no doubt arrived in time at Master Alexandre Crottat's.

"Old man Léger," said Pierrotin as he reached the steep hill of the Faubourg Saint-Denis at the Rue de la Fidélité, "let's get down, eh?"

"I get down also," said the count as he heard this name, "it is necessary to relieve your horses."

"Ah! if we are going thus, we will make fourteen leagues a fortnight!" Georges exclaimed.

"Is it my fault?" said Pierrotin. "A passenger wants to get out!"

"Ten louis for you, if you faithfully keep for me the secret that I have asked of you," said the count in a low voice as he took hold of Pierrotin's arm.

"Oh! my thousand francs," Pierrotin said within himself, after having given Monsieur de Sérizy a wink that meant: "Count on me!"

Oscar and Georges remained in the coach.

"Listen, Pierrotin, as Pierrotin it is," Georges exclaimed when, after reaching the top of the hill, the passengers had taken their seats again, "if you are not going to make any better speed than this, say so! I pay for my seat and I take a pony at Saint-Denis, for I have important business that would be compromised by delay."

"Oh! it will go all right," old Léger replied. "And, moreover, the road is not wide."

"Never have I been over half an hour late," replied Pierrotin.

"In fine, you are not trundling the Pope, are you?" said Georges; "so, go ahead!"

"You owe no preference, and if you are afraid of jolting the gentleman too much," said Mistigris as he pointed to the count, "it is not right."

"All passengers in the cuckoo have equal rights,

just as Frenchmen have under the Charter," said Georges.

"Don't be uneasy," said old Léger, "we will certainly reach La Chapelle before noon."

La Chapelle is the village contiguous to the Saint-Denis barrier.

All who have traveled know that persons brought together by chance in a coach do not all at once become sociable with one another; and, except under rare circumstances, they chat only after having gone a little distance. This time of silence is taken up as well with a mutual examination as with the taking possession of the seat to which one is assigned. The soul has as much need as the body of finding its equilibrium. When each one thinks he has found out the secret of the real age, the profession and the character of his companions, the most talkative then begins, and conversation is indulged in with so much the more zest as everybody has felt the need of embellishing the journey and relieving its tedium. Things happen thus in French coaches. With other nations manners are quite different. The English pride themselves on not opening their mouths; a German is sombre in a coach, and an Italian is too prudent to chat; the Spaniards now have hardly any stage-coaches, and the Russians have no roads. People amuse themselves, then, only in the heavy coaches of France, in this country so babbling, so indiscreet, where everybody is eager to laugh and show his wit, where raillery enlivens everything, from the miseries of the lower classes to the grave interests of

the solid bourgeois. The police, besides, there bridles the tongue but little, and the tribune has there made discussion the fashion. When a young man of twenty-two, like him who was concealed under the name of Georges, has wit, he is excessively disposed, especially in the present situation, to abuse it. In the first place, Georges had soon decided that he was the superior being of this assemblage. He saw a second-rate manufacturer in the count, whom he took for a cutler; a suspicious fellow in the passably comely young man accompanied by Mistigris, a little simpleton in Oscar, and in the fat farmer an excellent personage to mystify. After having thus taken his measures, he resolved to amuse himself at the expense of his traveling companions.

"Let us see," he said to himself as Pierrotin's cuckoo was going down from La Chapelle to dash into the Saint-Denis plain, "shall I make myself pass as being Étienne or Béranger?—No, those dolts are not people who would know either one of them. A Carbonaro?—The devil! I might get myself into trouble. If I were one of Marshal Ney's sons?—Bah! what would I talk to them about? My father's execution. That wouldn't be funny. If I were returning from the Champ d'Asile?—They might take me for a spy, they would distrust me. Let me be a disguised Russian prince, I am going to make them swallow wonderful tales about the Emperor Alexander—Suppose I pretended to be Cousin, professor of philosophy?—O! how I could mix

them all up! No, that suspicious-looking fellow with bushy hair appears to me as if he had dragged his boots through the courts of the Sorbonne. Why didn't I think of making them start sooner? I can imitate the English so well, I might have posed as Lord Byron, traveling incognito—Zounds! I missed my chance. To be the executioner's son?—That's a madcap idea to be set going at breakfast. Oh! good, I will have commanded the troops of Ali, Pasha of Janina."

During this mental soliloquy the coach was rolling through waves of dust that incessantly sent up their spray from the low sides of the well-beaten road.

"What dust!" said Mistigris.

"Henri IV. is dead," his companion quickly retorted to him. "But if you said that it scents of vanilla, you would express a new opinion."

"You think you're saying something funny," said Mistigris; "well, that reminds me occasionally of vanilla."

"In the Levant—" said Georges, wanting to get up a story.

"In the wind—*le vent*—," the master rejoined to Mistigris, interrupting Georges.

"I say in the Levant, whence I am returning," Georges continued, "dust feels all right; but here it feels as nothing save when one meets with a deposit of powdered excrement like this."

"The gentleman comes from the Levant?" said Mistigris in a sly tone.

"You see clearly that the gentleman is so fatigued that he has taken to his seat," his master replied to him.

"You are not very much browned by the sun," said Mistigris.

"Oh! I have just left my bed after an illness of three months, the germ of which, the physicians say, was a checked pestilential malady."

"You have had the plague?" the count exclaimed, as he affected to be frightened. "Pierrotin, stop!"

"Go on, Pierrotin," said Mistigris. "You have been told that it was checked, the plague was," he repeated, addressing Monsieur de Sérizy. "It's a plague that passes in conversation."

"One of those plagues of which we say 'Plague on it!'" the master exclaimed.

"Or, 'Plague on the middle-class!'" Mistigris rejoined.

"Mistigris!" the master said, "I will make you walk if you carry on so. So," he said as he turned towards Georges, "the gentleman has been to the East?"

"Yes, sir, first to Egypt, and then to Greece, where I served under Ali, Pasha of Janina, with whom I had a terrible experience. One cannot stand those climates. And so the emotions of every kind that are incident to life in the Orient upset my liver."

"Ah! you were in the service?" said the big farmer. "How old are you?"

"I am twenty-nine," replied Georges, at whom

all the passengers stared. "At eighteen I set out as a private soldier for the famous campaign of 1813; but I saw only the fight at Hanau, and I there won the rank of sergeant-major. In France, at Montereau, I was made sub-lieutenant, and I was decorated by—there are no spies?—by the Emperor."

"You are decorated," said Oscar, "and don't wear the Cross?"

"The Cross of these people?—Good-evening. Besides, what well-bred man will wear his decorations when traveling? Look at that gentleman," he said as he pointed to the Comte de Sérizy, "I'll wager as much as you please—"

"To bet as much as you please is in France a way of betting nothing at all," said the master to Mistigris.

"I wager all you wish," Georges continued affectedly, "that this gentleman is covered with stars."

"I have," the Comte de Sérizy replied smiling, "that of the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor, that of St. Andrew of Russia, that of the Eagle of Prussia, that of the Annunziata of Sardinia, and that of the Golden Fleece."

"Pardon me!" said Mistigris. "And all that travels in the cuckoo?"

"Ah! he's all right, the good man of a brick-color is," Georges whispered in Oscar's ear. "Eh! what was it I said to you?" he continued in a loud voice. "As for me, I do not conceal it at all, I adore the Emperor—"

"I served under him," said the count.

"What a man, was he not?" Georges exclaimed.

"A man to whom I am under many obligations," the count replied with a simpleton air very well put on.

"Your crosses—" said Mistigris.

"And how much snuff he used!" continued Monsieur de Sérizy.

"Oh! he carried it in his pockets, even," said Georges.

"I have been told that," old Léger interjected in an almost incredulous tone.

"Nay, more than that, he chewed and smoked," continued Georges. "I saw him smoking, and in such a funny way, at Waterloo, when Marshal Soult took him in his arms and threw him into his carriage, just as he had clutched a gun and was going to charge the English!—"

"You were at Waterloo?" remarked Oscar, whose eyes stared.

"Yes, young man, I took part in the campaign of 1815. I was captain at Mont-Saint-Jean, and I fell back on the Loire, when we were disbanded. Faith! France disgusted me, and I couldn't rest in it. No, I would have got myself into trouble. And so I departed with two or three jolly fellows, Selves, Besson and others, who are now in Egypt, in the service of Mohammed Pasha, a funny-looking fellow, see! Formerly a mere tobacco dealer at La Cavalle, he is on the way to become sovereign prince. You have seen him in Horace Vernet's

painting, *The Massacre of the Mamelukes*. What a handsome man! As for me, I did not want to give up the religion of my fathers and embrace Islamism, so much the more as abjuration entails a surgical operation for which I do not care at all. Then no one holds a renegade in esteem. Ah! if they had offered me a hundred thousand francs income, perhaps—and still!—no. The pasha made me a present of a thousand talari—"

"What's that?" asked Oscar, who was listening with his ears all attention.

"Oh! not very much. The talaro is about what we would call a hundred-sou piece. And, faith, I did not get the interest on the vices that I contracted in that God-forsaken country, if indeed it is a country. I can no longer do without smoking the narguileh twice a day, and that is expensive—"

"And how, then, is Egypt?" Monsieur de Sérizy asked.

"Egypt is all sand," Georges replied, not at all nonplussed. "There is no green except in the valley of the Nile. Draw a green line on a yellow sheet of paper, that's Egypt. The Egyptians, for example, the fellahs have an advantage over us, there are no gendarmes. Oh! you might do all Egypt and you wouldn't see one."

"I suppose there are many Egyptians," said Mistigris.

"Not so many as you think," Georges replied; "there are many more Abyssinians, Giaours, Vechabites, Bedouins and Copts—In fine, all those

animals are so uninteresting that I was very happy on embarking on a Genoese polaque that was going to the Ionian Islands to take on a cargo of powder and munitions for Ali of Tébélen. You know that the English sell powder and munitions to everybody, to the Turks, to the Greeks; they would sell them to the devil if the devil had money. So, from Zante we had to tack along the coast of Greece. Such as you see me, my name Georges is famous in those countries. I am the grandson of that celebrated Czerni-Georges who made war on the Porte, and who, unfortunately, instead of burying it, was himself buried. His son took refuge in the house of the French consul at Smyrna, and he came to die in Paris in 1792, leaving my mother pregnant of me, her seventh child. All our property was stolen by one of my grandfather's friends, so that we were ruined. My mother, who lived on the money she got for her diamonds, which she sold one by one, in 1799 married Monsieur Yung, my step-father, a purveyor. But my mother is dead, and I have quarreled with my step-father, who, between ourselves, is a scoundrel; he is still living, but we do not see each other. That cur left all seven of us without as much as saying: 'Are you a dog? Are you a wolf?' That is why, in despair, I set out in 1813 as a simple conscript—You would not believe with what joy that old Ali of Tébélen received Czerni-Georges' grandson. Here, I have myself simply called Georges. The pasha gave me a seraglio—"

"You had a seraglio?" said Oscar.

"Were you a many-tailed pasha?" Mistigris asked.

"How is it you don't know," Georges continued, "that it is only the Sultan who makes pashas, and that my friend Tébélen, for we were friends like Bourbons, revolted against the Padishah! You know, or you do not know, that the Grand Signor's title is Padishah, and not Grand Turk or Sultan. Do not think that this seraglio is much of a thing; you might as well have a flock of goats. Those women are very stupid, and I would rather a hundred times have the Chaumière damsels of Montparnasse."

"That is nearer at hand," said the Comte de Sérizy.

"The seraglio women do not know a word of French, and language is indispensable to mutual understanding. Ali gave me five lawful wives and ten slaves. At Janina it was as if I had had nothing. In the Orient, you see, to have wives is very bad form, they have them as we here have Voltaire and Rousseau; but who ever opens his Voltaire or his Rousseau? Nobody. And yet the best form is to be jealous. One sews up a woman in a bag and throws her into the water on mere suspicion, in accordance with an article of their code."

"Did you throw in any?" the farmer asked.

"I! fie on you, a Frenchman! I loved them."

At this point Georges curled again and turned up his mustaches and assumed a dreamy air. They were entering Saint-Denis, where Pierrotin stopped

before the door of the innkeeper who sells the famous cheese-cakes and where all the passengers get out. Puzzled by the appearances of truth mixed with Georges' pleasantries, the count got back into the coach at once, looked under the cushion for the portfolio that Pierrotin told him had been put there by this enigmatic personage, and read in gilt letters: "Master Crottat, notary." The count at once took the liberty of opening the portfolio, fearing with good reason lest old Léger might be seized with like curiosity; he took out of it the deed that concerned the Moulineaux farm, folded it, put it in the inside breast pocket of his overcoat, and returned to examine the passengers.

"This Georges is none other than Crottat's second clerk. I will pay my respects to his employer, who was to have sent me his first clerk," he said to himself.

By the respectful bearing of old Léger and Oscar, Georges understood that he had fervent admirers in them; he posed naturally as a great lord, he treated them to cheese-cakes and a glass of Alicante wine, as he did also Mistigris and his master, taking advantage of this liberality to ask them their names.

"Oh! sir," said Mistigris's master, "I am not favored with an illustrious name like yours, I am not returning from Asia."

At that moment the count, who had hurried to enter the innkeeper's immense kitchen, so as not to give rise to any suspicion regarding his discovery, was able to hear the closing words of this answer:

"—I am merely a poor painter returning from Rome, whither I went at the expense of the Government, after having won the grand prize, five years ago. My name is Schinner."

"Eh! city swell, may we offer you a glass of Alicante and some cheese-cakes?" said Georges to the comte.

"Thanks," said the count, "I never go out without having taken my cup of coffee with cream."

"And you eat nothing between meals? How like Marais, Place Royale and Ile Saint-Louis!" said Georges. "When he was humbugging a while ago about his crosses, I thought him stronger than he is," he said in a low voice to the painter; "but we will get on to him again about his decorations indeed, the little candle-maker. Come, my good fellow," he said to Oscar, "quaff for me the glass poured out for the grocer, it will make your mustache grow."

Oscar wanted to play the man, he drank the second glass and ate three more cheese-cakes.

"Good wine," said old Léger as he smacked his tongue against the roof of his mouth.

"It is so much the better," said Georges, "as it comes from Bercy! I've been to Alicante, and, do you see, it is as much wine of that country as my arm resembles a windmill. Our imitation wines are much better than the natural wines. Come, Pierrotin, a glass?—Eh! It is a great pity your horses can't sniff one each, we would go much faster."

"Oh! that's not the trouble, I have already a *groggy* horse," said Pierrotin as he pointed to Bichette.

On hearing this vulgar pun, Oscar thought Pierrotin a great fellow.

"Away we go!"

This expression of Pierrotin's sounded amid whip-cracking, when the passengers got into their cage again.

It was then eleven o'clock. The weather, that had been a little cloudy, became clear, the wind overhead drove away the clouds, the ethereal blue was seen in spots; and so, when the Pierrotin coach dashed out on the narrow ribbon of a road that runs from Saint-Denis to Pierrefitte, the sun had completely dispelled the last slight vapors whose diaphanous veil enveloped the country in those famous precincts.

"Well, why, then, did you leave your friend the pasha?" old Léger asked Georges.

"He was a strange wag," Georges answered with an air that concealed many mysteries. "Picture to yourself his giving me his cavalry to command—very well."

"Ah! that is why he wears spurs," poor Oscar thought.

"In my time Ali of Tébélen had to get rid of Chosrew-Pasha, another droll swaggerer. You call him here *Chaureff*, but his name in Turkish is pronounced *Cossereu*. You must have read formerly in the newspapers that old Ali thrashed Chosrew,

and that soundly. Well, without me Ali of Tébélen would have been whipped some days sooner. I was at the right wing and I saw Chosrew, an artful old fellow, breaking into our centre—oh! there! straightway and by a clever manœuvre in the Murat fashion. Good! I bide my time, I make a headlong dash, and cut in two Chosrew's column, which had passed the centre and remained exposed. You understand—Ah! forsooth, after the affair Ali embraced me—"

"They do that in the East?" said the Comte de Sérizy in a jovial way.

"Yes, sir," the painter replied, "that's done everywhere."

"We drove Chosrew back over thirty leagues of country—as in a hunt, think!" Georges continued. "They are accomplished horsemen, are those Turks. Ali gave me yataghans, guns and scimitars!—do you want them! there they are. On returning to his capital, this devilish buffoon made me propositions that did not suit me at all. Those Orientals are funny fellows when they have an idea—Ali wanted me to be his favorite, his heir. As for me, I had had enough of that sort of life; for, after all, Ali of Tébélen was in rebellion against the Porte, and I deemed it prudent to take to the port. But I will do justice to Monsieur de Tébélen, he loaded me with presents—diamonds, ten thousand talari, a thousand gold pieces, a Greek belle for groom, a little Arnaut girl for companion, and an Arab steed. Well, Ali, Pasha of Janina, is a much

misunderstood man, he ought to have a historian. It is only in the Orient that one meets with those souls of bronze that for twenty years do everything to be able to avenge an offence some fine morning. In the first place, he had the finest white beard that one could see, a hard, severe countenance—"

"But what have you done with your treasures?" asked old Léger.

"Ah! that's it. Those folks have no national securities or Bank of France, and I accordingly carried my pickings away on a Greek tartan that was seized by the pasha-captain himself! Just as you see me, I came near being gibbeted at Smyrna. Yes, on my word, without Monsieur de Rivière, the ambassador, who was there at the time, they would have taken me for an accomplice of Ali-Pasha. I saved my head, if I may honestly say so, but the ten thousand talari, the thousand gold pieces, the arms, oh! all were swallowed up by the captain-pasha's *thirsty* treasury. My position was so much the more difficult as that captain-pasha was no other than Chosrew. Since his drubbing the funny fellow had obtained this place, which was equivalent to that of grand admiral of France."

"But he was in the cavalry, as it appears?" said old Léger, who was attentively following Georges' narrative.

"Oh! how clear it is that little is known of the Orient in the department of Seine-et-Oise!" exclaimed Georges. "The Turks are like this, sir: you are a farmer, the padishah appoints you marshal;

if you do not fill your office satisfactorily, so much the worse for you, off goes your head: that's his way of getting rid of office-holders. A gardener becomes prefect, and a prime minister becomes a messenger once more. The Ottomans know nothing of the law of promotion or of hierarchy! From being a cavalier, Chosrew had become a marine. Padishah Mahmoud had commissioned him to attack Ali by sea, and indeed he made himself master of him, but by the aid of the English, who have had the lion's share, the rascals! they seized the treasures. This Chosrew, who had not forgotten the lesson in horse-riding that I taught him, recognized me. You understand that it was all over with me, oh! quick! if it had not occurred to me to place myself under Monsieur de Rivière's protection as a Frenchman and a troubadour. The ambassador, only too glad to show his hand, demanded my being set at liberty. There is this to be said of the character of the Turks, that they let you go as easily as they cut off your head, they are indifferent to everything. The French consul, a charming man, a friend of Chosrew, had two thousand talari returned to me; and so his name, I need hardly say, is graven in my heart—"

"You call him?" Monsieur de Sérizy asked.

Monsieur de Sérizy allowed indications of astonishment to play on his countenance when Georges indeed gave him the name of one of our most noted consuls-general, who was then at Smyrna.

"I may say, parenthetically, that I witnessed the

execution of the commanding officer at Smyrna, whom the padishah had ordered Chosrew to put to death, one of the most curious things that I have seen, and I have seen many strange happenings; I will tell you of it later on, while at lunch. From Smyrna I went to Spain, on learning that a revolution was in progress there. Oh! I went direct to Mina, who took me as aide-de-camp, and gave me the rank of colonel. I fought for the constitutional cause that is going to succumb, for we are going to enter Spain one of these days."

"And you are a French officer?" the Comte de Sérizy said to him severely. "You are depending a great deal on the discretion of those who are listening to you!"

"But there are no spies here," said Georges.

"You are not aware, then, Colonel Georges," said the count, "that just now the court of peers is trying a conspiracy case, that is making the Government very strict in regard to soldiers who bear arms against France, and who hatch intrigue abroad with the design of overthrowing our lawful sovereigns?—"

At this terrible remark, the painter blushed even to his ears, and looked at Mistigris, who seemed dumfounded.

"Well," said old Léger, "after that?"

"If, for example, I were a magistrate, wouldn't it be my duty," the count replied, "to have Mina's aide-de-camp arrested by the gendarmes of the Pierrefitte brigade, and to summon as witnesses all the passengers who are in the coach—"

These words so much the more effectively cut Georges' speech short as they were just coming up to the gendarme brigade, whose white flag was floating in the breeze, as the classic phrase has it.

"You have too many decorations to allow yourself to do such a mean thing," said Oscar.

"We're going to get it back on him," Georges whispered in Oscar's ear.

"Colonel," exclaimed Léger, who was worried at the Comte de Sérizy's sally and wanted to change the conversation, "in the countries to which you have been, how do people farm there? What is their rotation of crops?"

"In the first place, you understand, my good man, that those folks are too busy manuring themselves to manure their fields—"

The count could not help smiling. That smile gave confidence to the story-teller.

"But they have a way of cultivating that will seem funny to you. They do not cultivate at all, that is their way of cultivating. Whether Turk or Greek, they eat onions or rice—They get opium from their corn-poppies, which brings them large revenues; and then, they have tobacco that grows spontaneously, latakia! then dates! a host of sweet things that grow without cultivation. It is a country full of resources and of commerce. They make a great many rugs at Smyrna, and not at all dear."

"But," said Léger, "rugs are made of wool, which we get only from sheep; and to have sheep we must have grazing, farms, cultivation."

"There must indeed be something like that," Georges replied; "but rice grows in water, in the first place; then, as for me, I have always been along the coast, and have seen only countries ravaged by war. Moreover, I have the greatest aversion to statistics."

"And the tariff?" said old Léger.

"Ah! the taxes are heavy. One takes everything from them, but leaves them the rest. Struck by the advantages of this system, the pasha of Egypt was on the fair way to organizing his administration on that system when I left him."

"And how?" said old Léger, who no longer understood anything.

"How?" Georges continued. "But he has agents who take the crops, leaving to the fellahs just enough to live on. And so, in that system, there are no dusty old papers, there is no bureaucracy, the plague of France—Ah! that's it!"

"But by virtue of what?" said the farmer.

"It is a country of despotism, that's all. Don't you know the fine definition of despotism given by Montesquieu: 'Like the savage, it cuts the tree close to the ground so as to have its fruit'—"

"And they would bring us to that," said Mistigris; "but, 'a burnt child dreads the *mire.*'"

"And people will come to that," the Comte de Sérizy exclaimed. "And so those who own land will do well to sell it. Monsieur Schinner must have seen how things are coming to that in Italy."

"*Corpo di Bacco!* the Pope does not proceed there

by mortmain!" Schinner replied. "But they are used to it. The Italians are such a good people! Provided we leave them a little liberty to assassinate travelers on the road, they are satisfied."

"But," continued the count, "no longer do you wear the decoration of the Legion of Honor which you got in 1819; it's a general custom, then?"

Mistigris and the false Schinner blushed back to their ears.

"I! that's different," Schinner replied, "I would not want to be known. Don't betray me, sir. I am thought to be an obscure painter of no consequence, I pass for a decorator. I am going to a château where I am not to arouse any suspicion."

"Ah!" remarked the count, "a piece of good luck, an intrigue?—Oh! you are very fortunate in being young—"

Oscar, who was chagrined at being nothing and at having nothing to say, looked at Colonel Czerni-Georges and the great painter Schinner, and tried to metamorphose himself into a somebody. But what could a boy of nineteen be, whom they were sending for two or three weeks into the country, to the manager of Presles? The Alicante wine was going to his head, and his pride made his blood boil in his veins; and so, when the false Schinner let in some light on his romantic adventure, whose happiness was to be as great as his danger, he fixed on him his eyes, sparkling with rage and envy.

"Ah!" said the count with an envious and

credulous air, "you must indeed love a woman to make such enormous sacrifices for her—"

"What sacrifices?" remarked Mistigris.

"Don't you know, then, my little friend, that a ceiling painted by so great a master is covered with gold?" the count replied. "Let us see! The Civil List pays you thirty thousand francs for those of two halls of the Louvre," he continued, as he looked at Schinner; "for a man of the middle-class, as you say of us in your workshops, a ceiling is indeed worth twenty thousand francs: now one will scarcely give two thousand to an obscure decorator."

"The less money is not the greatest loss," Mistigris replied. "Think, then, that it will certainly be a masterpiece, and that it must not be signed so as not to compromise her!"

"Ah! I would indeed give back all my crosses to all the sovereigns of Europe, to be loved as is that young man in whom love inspires such devotedness!" exclaimed Monsieur de Sérizy.

"Ah! that's it," Mistigris replied, "one is young, one is loved! one has women, and, as the saying is, 'Store is no *bore.*' "

"And what does Madame Schinner say to that?" the count rejoined, "for from love you have married the pretty Adelaïde de Rouville, the protégée of old Admiral de Kergarouët, who got for you your ceilings at the Louvre through his nephew, the Comte de Fontaine."

"Is a great painter ever married when on a journey?" remarked Mistigris.

"See then, the morality of the studio!" the Comte de Sérizy innocently remarked.

"Is the morality of the courts from which you got your decorations any better?" said Schinner, who recovered his coolness that was momentarily disturbed by the knowledge that the count showed he possessed, of the contracts awarded to Schinner.

"I didn't ask for a single one of them," the count replied, "and I believe I honestly earned them all."

"And so you 'make assurance doubly *poor*,'" Mistigris replied.

Monsieur de Sérizy did not want to betray himself, and so he assumed an air of simplicity as he looked over the valley of Groslay, which opens up as one takes, at Patte-d'Oie, the Saint-Brice road, leaving that of Chantilly on the right.

"A take-in!" said Oscar grumbling.

"Is it as beautiful as people pretend, Rome, I mean?" Georges asked of the great painter.

"Rome is beautiful only to people who love, one must have a passion to be pleased there; but as a city I prefer Venice, though I came near being assassinated there."

"Faith, without me," said Mistigris, "you'd have swallowed the bait nicely! 'Twas that devilish buffoon, Lord Byron, that got you that. Oh! that stupid dolt of an Englishman must have been a madman!"

"Sht!" said Schinner, "I don't want any one to know of my affair with Lord Byron."

"You must acknowledge just the same," Mistigris

replied, "how lucky it was for you that I had learned how to *wield the slipper?*"

From time to time, Pierrotin exchanged with the Comte de Sérizy strange looks that would have disturbed people slightly less experienced than were the five passengers.

"Lords, pashas, ceilings at thirty thousand francs! Ah, there!" exclaimed the L'Isle-Adam carrier, "I am drawing sovereigns to-day, then? What tips!"

"Without counting that the seats are paid for," shrewdly remarked Mistigris.

"That comes to me in good stead," Pierrotin rejoined; "for, old man Léger, you know all about my fine new coach on which I have given two thousand francs earnest—Well, those scamps of carriage-builders, to whom I must count out two thousand five hundred francs to-morrow, don't want to accept a payment of fifteen hundred francs and take my note for a thousand francs for two months!—Those screws want all. To be hard on this point with a man who has been established for eight years, with a father of a family, and to put him in danger of losing everything, both money and coach, if I don't find a miserable note for a thousand francs! Whew! Bichette.—They wouldn't play such a trick on the big concerns."

"Ah! marry; 'No penny, no *pass*,'" said the grinder.

"You have only eight hundred francs to scrape up," the count replied, seeing in this wail

addressed to old Léger, a sort of bill of exchange drawn on him.

"That's true," rejoined Pierrotin. "Get up! Rougeot."

"You must have seen some fine ceilings at Venice," continued the count, addressing Schinner.

"I was too much in love to pay attention to what then seemed to me to be only trifles," Schinner replied. "I was, however, to be thoroughly cured of love, for in the same Venetian states, in Dalmatia, I was taught a severe lesson."

"May it be mentioned?" Georges asked. "I know Dalmatia."

"Well, if you have been there, you ought to know that at the head of the Adriatic they are all old pirates, sea-robbers, corsairs retired from business, when they have not been hanged, and—"

"The Uscoques, in fine," said Georges.

On hearing the proper name the count, whom Napoléon had formerly sent to the Illyrian provinces, turned his head around, so astonished was he.

"It was in the city in which maraschino is made," said Schinner, as he seemed to be looking for a word.

"Zara!" said Georges. "I've been there, it is on the coast."

"You have it," continued the painter. "As for me, I went there to see the country, for I adore landscape. At least a score of times have I desired to make landscape pictures, which, in my opinion, no one understands except Mistigris, who will one

day continue Hobbema, Ruysdael, Claude Lorrain, Poussin and others."

"But," the count exclaimed, "to continue only one of those will be quite enough."

"If you keep on interrupting, sir," said Oscar, "we will lose sight of what is being talked about."

"Besides, it isn't you that the gentleman is speaking to," said Georges to the count.

"It is not polite to interrupt a remark," Mistigris said sententiously; "but we have all done so all the same, and we would lose a great deal if we didn't intersperse the discourse with little pleasantries exchanging our reflections. All Frenchmen are equal in the cuckoo, Georges' grandson has said. So, continue, pleasant old man!—humbug us. That's done in the best society; and you know the proverb: 'When you are at *home*, you must do as they do at Rome.'"

"They had told wonderful things about Dalmatia," continued Schinner; "accordingly, I went there, leaving Mistigris at the inn in Venice."

"At the *locanda!*" retorted Mistigris, "let's give it its local coloring."

"Zara, as they say, is a dirty place—"

"Yes," said Georges, "but it is fortified."

"Forsooth!" said Schinner, "the fortifications count for much in my adventure. At Zara there are many apothecaries, and I lodged with one of them. In foreign countries everybody's chief trade is to rent a furnished room, the other trade is an accessory. In the evening I go to my balcony after

having changed linen. Now on the balcony opposite I observe a woman, oh! but a woman, a Greek, and, which is saying everything, the most beautiful creature in the whole city: eyes outlined like an almond, pupils that unfolded themselves like jalousies, and lashes fine as an artist's pencil; a countenance so oval as to drive Raphael mad, a complexion of delicious coloring, the tints well-blended, velvety—; hands, oh!—"

"That were not of butter, like those of the David school of painting," said Mistigris.

"Eh! you are always talking to us of painting," Georges exclaimed.

"Ah! 'What is *bread* in the bone will come out in the flesh,'" Mistigris replied.

"And a costume! the pure Greek costume," continued Schinner. "You understand that I was all aflame. I question my Diafoirus, and he tells me that this neighbor is named Zena. I change linen. To marry Zena, her husband, an old wretch, gave three hundred thousand francs to her relatives, so famous was the beauty of this truly most beautiful girl in all Dalmatia, Illyria, the Adriatic, etc. In that country a man buys his wife, and without seeing—"

"I'll not go," said old Léger.

"There are nights when my sleep is lit up by Zena's eyes," Schinner continued. "That young premier of a husband was sixty-seven years old. Good! But he was jealous, not quite as a tiger, for it is said of tigers that they are as jealous as a

Dalmatian, and my man was worse than a Dalmatian, he was equal to three Dalmatians and a half. He was an Uscoque, a tricoque, an archicoque, in a bicoque, a paltry place."

"In fine, one of those jolly fellows that 'don't chain up their *hogs* with sausages,'" said Mistigris.

"Famous!" remarked Georges, laughing.

"After having been a corsair, perhaps a pirate, my funny fellow talked lightly of killing a Christian, as I would of spitting on the ground," Schinner continued. "That's the kind of chap that gets along all right. Moreover, rich enough to be a millionaire, the old scamp! and ugly as a pirate whom no pasha that I know of would have robbed of his ears, and who had left an eye I don't know where—The Uscoque made very good use of the one that was left to him, and I beg you to believe me when I tell you that he had an eye on everything. 'Never,' Diafoirus told me, 'does he leave his wife.' 'If she might need your ministration, I would take your place in disguise; that's a turn that's always successful in our theatrical pieces,' I replied to him. It would take too long to depict to you the most delightful time of my life, namely, the three days that I spent at my window, exchanging looks with Zena and changing linen every morning. It was so much the more violently ticklish as the slightest movements were significant and dangerous. At last Zena thought, no doubt, that a foreigner, a Frenchman, an artist, was the only one in the world capable of casting sheep's eyes at her, in the midst of

the abyss that surrounded her; and, as she execrated her frightful pirate, she answered my looks with glances that would lift a man to the highest arch of heaven without pulleys. I reached the height of the Don Quixote pinnacle. I go higher, and still higher! At last I exclaimed to myself: 'Well, the old man will kill me, but I will go on!' No landscape studies, I was studying the bicoque of Uscoque. At night, having put on the most perfumed of my linen, I crossed the street, I was entering—"

"The house?" said Oscar."

"The house?" Georges repeated.

"The house," also repeated Schinner.

"Well, you're a spanker," Léger exclaimed; "I wouldn't have gone there, I—"

"So much the more as you couldn't have entered the door," replied Schinner. "I entered, however," he continued, "and I found two hands that took hold of my two hands. I said nothing, for those hands, soft as an onion skin, advised me to be silent. In Venetian dialect it was whispered in my ear: 'He sleeps!' Then, when we were sure that no one could meet us, we went, Zena and I, to walk on the ramparts, but accompanied, if you please, by an old duenna, ugly as an old porter, and who stuck to us as closely as our shadows, without my being able to get the pirate's wife to separate from that absurd company. Next evening we began over again; I wanted to dismiss the old woman, Zena resisted. As my inamorata spoke Greek and I Venetian, we could not understand each other;

and so we parted at loggerheads. I said to myself as I was changing linen: 'For a surety, for the first time, there will be no old woman, and we will come to terms, each in one's own mother tongue'—Well, it was the old woman that saved me! you are going to see how. The weather was so fine that, so as not to arouse any suspicions, I went to stroll in the country, after our reconciliation, be it well understood. After having walked along the ramparts, I came along quietly with my hands in my pockets, and I saw the street blocked with people. A crowd! —as if for an execution. That crowd rushed on me. I was arrested, garroted, led away and guarded by policemen. No, you do not know, and I do not want you ever to know, what it is to be taken for an assassin in the eyes of an unbridled populace that throws stones at you, that hoots after you from the upper to the lower end of the main street of a small city, that follows you with death-dealing shouts!— Ah! the eyes of all are like so many flames, the mouths of all hurl insult, and these brands of scorching hate are let loose to the frightful yell: 'Kill him! down with the assassin!' sounding from afar like a tenor voice."

"They shouted in French, then, did those Dalmatians?" the count asked Schinner. "You tell us of this incident as if it had happened to you yesterday."

Schinner remained quite unconcerned.

"Riot speaks the same language everywhere," said that profound politician, Mistigris.

"In fine," Schinner continued, "when I reached the palace of the place and was in the presence of the magistrates of the country, I learned that the damned corsair was dead, poisoned by Zena. I might well have wanted to be able to change linen. On my word of honor, I knew nothing of this melodrama. It seems that the Greek girl mixed opium —so much corn-poppy grows there, as the gentleman says!—with the pirate's grog in order to steal a few moments' liberty for the purpose of taking a walk, and, the evening before, this unfortunate woman made a mistake in the dose. The damned pirate's immense fortune was the cause of all my Zena's misfortune; but she explained matters so candidly that I, in the first place, on the old woman's declaration, was cleared of all blame, with an injunction from the mayor and the Austrian commissary of police to go to Rome. Zena, who let a large part of the Uscoque's riches go to the heirs and to justice, got off, I have been told, with two years' seclusion in a convent, where she still remains. I will go and make a portrait of her, for in a few years everything will be well forgotten. Such stupid things is one guilty of at eighteen."

"And you left me without a sou in the *locanda* at Venice," said Mistigris. "I made my way from Venice to Rome to find you, painting portraits at five francs apiece, and not getting paid for them; but it was the finest time I ever had! As the saying is, '*happiness* doesn't dwell under gilded *peelings*.'"

"You may picture to yourselves the reflections that took me by the throat in a Dalmatian prison, cast in there without protection, having to answer to Austrians of Dalmatia, and menaced with the loss of my head for having walked twice with a woman bent on keeping her portress by her. What ill-luck!" Schinner exclaimed.

"How did that happen to you?" Oscar naïvely asked.

"How could that not have happened to the gentleman, since it had happened once already during the French occupation of Illyria to one of our finest artillery officers?" the count said knowingly.

"And you believed the artilleryman?" as knowingly remarked Mistigris to the count.

"And that's all?" Oscar asked.

"Well," said Mistigris, "he can't tell you that they cut off his head. 'The *sore* the merrier.'"

"Are there any farms in that country, sir?" old Léger asked. "How do they cultivate there?"

"They cultivate maraschino," said Mistigris, "a plant that grows as high as your mouth, and that produces the liqueur of that name."

"Ah!" said old Léger.

"I remained only three days in town and a fortnight in prison, I saw nothing, not even the fields where the maraschino grows," Schinner replied.

"They are poking fun at you," said Georges to old Léger. "Maraschino comes in cases."

*

The Pierrotin coach was then going down one of the slopes of the deep valley of Saint-Brice, to reach the inn situated in the centre of that big town, where it stopped about an hour in order to give its horses a breathing spell, to feed them oats and water them. It was then about half-past one.

"Well, it's old Léger," the innkeeper exclaimed, just as the coach drew up in front of his door. "Are you going to have lunch?"

"Once a day," the big farmer replied; "we're going to break a crust."

"Get us lunch," said Georges, holding his cane militarily in such a cavalier way as to excite Oscar's admiration.

Oscar went wild when he saw this devil-may-care adventurer taking from his side pocket a cigar-case of pleated straw from which he took a light cigar that he smoked on the doorstep while waiting for lunch.

"Do you smoke?" said Georges to Oscar.

"Sometimes," replied the ex-collegian as he swelled out his little chest and assumed a certain air of swagger.

Georges offered the wide-open case to Oscar and Schinner.

"Bless me!" said the great painter, "ten-sou cigars!"

"That's all that's left of what I brought with me from Spain," said the adventurer. "Are you going to have lunch?"

"No," said the artist, "I'm expected at the château. Besides, I took something before leaving."

"And you?" said Georges to Oscar.

"I have breakfasted," said Oscar.

Oscar would have given ten years of his life to have boots and gaiter-straps. And he sneezed, and he coughed, and he spat, and he drew in the smoke with badly disguised grimaces.

"You don't know how to smoke," said Schinner to him, "see!"

Schinner, with undisturbed countenance, drew in the smoke from his cigar, and blew it out through his nose without the slightest contraction. He began over again, kept the smoke in his throat, took the cigar out of his mouth and blew out the smoke gracefully.

"Look at that, young man," said the great painter.

"Look at that, young man, another process," said Georges imitating Schinner, but swallowing all the smoke and expelling none of it.

"And my folks who thought they had given me an education!" poor Oscar thought as he tried to smoke gracefully.

He felt so great a nausea that he willingly allowed Mistigris to filch the cigar, and the latter said to him as he smoked it with evident pleasure:

"You have no contagious disease?"

Oscar would have liked to be strong enough to fell Mistigris.

"What!" he said as he pointed to Colonel Georges, "eight francs for Alicante wine and cheese-cakes, forty sous for cigars, and his lunch that is going to cost him—"

"At least ten francs," Mistigris replied; "but that's the way it goes: 'Little streams make great *quivers.*'"

"Ah! old man Léger, we will by all means drink a bottle of Bordeaux," Georges then said to the farmer.

"His lunch is going to cost him twenty francs!" Oscar exclaimed. "So there goes now over thirty francs."

Afflicted by the feeling of his own inferiority, Oscar sat down on the ledge and was lost in a dream which did not allow him to see that his trousers, drawn up by the effect of his position, showed the joining of an old stocking leg with a new foot, one of his mother's masterpieces.

"We are brothers in stockings," said Mistigris as he slightly raised his trousers to show an effect of the same kind; "but, '*shoemakers are always the worst shot.*'"

This pleasantry caused a smile in Monsieur de Sérizy, who was standing with crossed arms under the gateway behind the passengers. However foolish these young men were, the grave statesman envied them their defects, he liked their buoyancy, he admired the vivacity of their pleasantries.

"Well, will you have the Moulineaux? for you have been to Paris to get money," said the innkeeper to old Léger, to whom he had just shown in his stables a pony he had for sale. "You will have some fun *shearing* a peer of France, a minister of State, the Comte de Sérizy."

The old administrator let no sign be visible on his countenance, and turned round to examine the farmer.

"It is all fixed," old Léger replied to the innkeeper in a low voice.

"Faith, so much the better, I like to see the nobles get *dished*—And if you needed twenty thousand francs, I would loan them to you; but François, the driver of the six o'clock Touchard, has just told me that Monsieur Margueron has been invited by the Comte de Sérizy to dine this very day at Presles."

"That's His Excellency's plan, but we also have our little schemes," old Léger replied.

"The count will get the place for Monsieur Margueron's son, and you have no place to give, not you!" said the innkeeper to the farmer.

"No; but, if the count has the ministers with him, as for me, I have King Louis XVIII.," old Léger whispered in the innkeeper's ear, "and forty thousand of his portraits given to goodman Moreau will enable me to buy the Moulineaux for two hundred and sixty thousand francs cash down before Monsieur de Sérizy, who will be very glad to buy back the farm for three hundred and sixty thousand

francs, rather than see the land put up in lots at auction."

"Not bad, burgher," the innkeeper exclaimed.

"Isn't it well planned?" said the farmer.

"After all," said the innkeeper, "the farm is worth that to him."

"The Moulineaux to-day brings six thousand francs clear income, and I will renew the lease at seven thousand five hundred for eighteen years. Thus it is an investment at over two and a half. The count will not be robbed. So as not to injure Monsieur Moreau, I will be proposed by him as lessee to the count; he will have the appearance of looking after his master's interests by getting for him nearly three per cent for his money and a tenant who will be good pay—"

"What will old Moreau have in all?"

"Forsooth, if the count gives him ten thousand francs, he will have fifty thousand francs out of this affair, but he will have well earned it."

"Besides, after all, he is taking good care of Presles! and *he* is so rich!" said the innkeeper. "I have never seen him myself."

"Nor I," said old Léger; "but he is coming at last to dwell here; otherwise he would not spend two hundred thousand francs on restoring the interior. 'Tis as fine as is the king's palace."

"Ah! well," said the innkeeper, "it was time for Moreau to butter his bread!"

"Yes, for once the masters are there," said Léger, "they will not put their eyes in their pockets."

The count did not lose a single word of this conversation held in a low voice.

"I have here the proofs, then, that I was going to look for down there," he thought as he scanned the big farmer, who went into the kitchen. "Perhaps," he said to himself, "it is as yet only in the condition of a plan? perhaps Moreau has accepted nothing?" still so repugnant was it to him to believe his manager capable of participating in such a conspiracy.

Pierrotin came to water his horses. The count thought that the driver was going to lunch with the innkeeper and the farmer; now what he had just heard led him to fear some indiscretion.

"All those people have an understanding against us, it is a fine thing to upset their plans," he thought. "Pierrotin," he said in a low voice to the coach-driver as he approached him, "I have promised you ten louis if you keep my secret; but if you want to continue to conceal my name—and I will know whether you have either pronounced my name or given the least sign that could reveal it until this evening, to anyone whomsoever, anywhere, even at L'Isle-Adam—I will give you tomorrow morning, on your way back, the thousand francs to finish paying for your new coach. Thus, for greater safety," said the count as he slapped the shoulder of Pierrotin, who had become pale with pleasure, "don't lunch, but stay at your horses' heads."

"Count, I understand you clearly, come! it is in reference to old Léger."

"It is in regard to everybody," the count replied.

"Make your mind easy—Let's hurry off," said Pierrotin as he opened the kitchen door, "we are late. Listen, old man Léger, you know that there is the hill to climb; as for me, I'm not hungry, I will go leisurely, you will easily catch up with me, it will do you good to walk."

"Is he mad? Pierrotin I mean!" remarked the innkeeper. "You do not want to come and lunch with us? The colonel is paying for fifty-sou wine and a bottle of champagne."

"I can't. I have a fish that must be left at Stors at three o'clock for a great dinner, and those customers are not to be trifled with, and neither are fish."

"Well," said old Léger to the innkeeper, "yoke to your cab that horse that you want to sell to me, you will make us catch up with Pierrotin, we will lunch in peace, and I will judge of the horse. There'll be quite room enough for three of us in your bone-shaker."

To the count's great satisfaction Pierrotin came himself to re-bridle his horses. Schinner and Mistigris had set out ahead. Scarcely had Pierrotin, who caught up with the two artists in the middle of the road between Saint-Brice and Poncelles, reached an eminence on the road from which one sees Écouen, the Le Mesnil belfry and the forests that entirely encircle a most delightful landscape, when the noise of a horse drawing a cab at a gallop that made its old iron rattle, announced old Léger and

Mina's companion, who got back to their places in the coach.

When Pierrotin dashed into the path to go down to Moisselles, Georges, who had never ceased talking of the Saint-Brice hostess's beauty to old Léger, exclaimed:

"Look! not a bad landscape, great painter?"

"Bah! it should not astonish you, you who have seen the Orient and Spain."

"And who still have two cigars from there! if it will not incommode anyone, will you finish them, Schinner? for the little young man has had enough in a few swallows."

Old Léger and the count observed a silence that was taken for approbation.

Oscar, irritated at being called a "little young man," said, while the two young men were lighting their cigars:

"If I have not been Mina's aide-de-camp, sir, if I have not been to the East, I will go, perhaps. The career for which my family intends me will, I hope, spare me the unpleasantness of traveling in a cuckoo when I will be your age. After having been a somebody, once in place I will stay there."

"*Et cætera punctum!*" put in Mistigris, mimicking the hoarse young rooster-voice in a way that made Oscar's speech still more ridiculous; for the poor youth was at that period of life when the beard is sprouting, when the voice takes on its character. "After all," Mistigris added, "'*extremes beat.*'"

"Faith!" remarked Schinner, "the horses will be able to go no farther with such a load."

"Your family, young man, think of starting you in a career, and what?" said Georges seriously.

"Diplomacy," Oscar replied.

Three shouts of laughter burst like fuses from the mouths of Mistigris, the great painter, and old Léger. The count himself could not help smiling. Georges kept cool.

"By Allah! there's nothing to laugh at," said the colonel to the laughers. "Only, young man," he continued, addressing Oscar, "it seems to me that your respectable mother is for the moment in a social position far from suitable for an ambassadress —She had a basket quite worthy of esteem and a toe-piece on her shoes."

"My mother, sir?" said Oscar in a tone of indignation. "Eh! that was the woman of all work at our house—"

" 'At our house' is quite aristocratic," the count exclaimed interrupting Oscar.

"The king says *our,*" Oscar replied proudly.

A look from Georges repressed the inclination to laugh that seized upon everybody; he thus gave the painter and Mistigris to understand how necessary it was to let Oscar have his way, so as to work this mine of pleasantry.

"The gentleman is right," said the great painter to the count as he pointed to Oscar; "the right kind of people say *our,* only vagrants say *at my house.* One has always the mania of appearing to

have what one has not. For a man loaded with decorations—"

"The gentleman is always a decorator, then?" rejoined Mistigris.

"You are hardly acquainted with the language of courts. I ask for your protection, Your Excellency," Schinner added as he turned toward Oscar.

"I congratulate myself on having traveled, no doubt, with three men who are or will be famous: a painter, illustrious already," said the count, "a future general and a young diplomat who will some day restore Belgium to France."

After having committed the odious crime of denying his mother, Oscar, enraged at seeing how his traveling companions were making fun of him, resolved at all hazards to conquer their incredulity.

"All that glitters is not gold," he said as he shot fire from his eyes.

"That's not it," exclaimed Mistigris. "It is: 'All is not *old* that glitters.' You will not go far in diplomacy unless you have better proverbs."

"If I do not know proverbs well, I know my way."

"You must be going far," said Georges, "for the woman of general work at your house slipped provisions to you as if for a journey beyond seas: biscuit, chocolate—"

"A special loaf and chocolate, yes, sir," continued Oscar, "for my stomach is much too delicate to digest the coarse ragouts of an inn."

THE COUNT DE SÉRIZY OVERHEARS

"Well, will you have the Moulineaux? for you have been to Paris to get money," said the innkeeper to old Léger, to whom he had just shown in his stables a pony he had for sale. "You will have some fun shearing *a peer of France, a minister of State, the Comte de Sérizy."*

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"The coarse ragouts of an inn are as delicate as your stomach," said Georges.

"Ah! I love them!" the great painter exclaimed.

"That expression is in fashion in the best society," Mistigris continued, "I make use of it at the *Black Hen* tap-room."

"Your preceptor is, no doubt, some famous professor, Monsieur Andrieux, of the French Academy, or Monsieur Royer-Collard?" Schinner asked.

"My preceptor's name is the Abbé Loraux, now curate at Saint-Sulpice," Oscar continued, remembering the name of the college confessor.

"You have done well to have yourself specially brought up," said Mistigris, "for tender plants want much *prayer;* but you will recompense your abbé, won't you?"

"Certainly, he'll be a bishop some day," said Oscar.

"Through the credit of your family?" Georges said seriously.

"Perhaps we will contribute to having him put in his place, for the Abbé Frayssinous often comes to the house."

"Ah! you know the Abbé Frayssinous?" the count asked.

"He owes obligations to my father," Oscar replied.

"And you are no doubt going to your estate?" Georges remarked.

"No, sir; but, as for me, I can say where I am

going, I am going to the Presles château, to the Comte de Sérizy's."

"Ah! the deuce! you are going to Presles?" Schinner exclaimed, turning as red as a cherry.

"You know His Lordship, the Comte de Sérizy?" Georges asked.

Old Léger turned to look at Oscar, and stared at him in a stupefied way, exclaiming:

"Is Monsieur de Sérizy at Presles?"

"Apparently, since I am going there," Oscar replied.

"And you have often seen the count?" Monsieur de Sérizy asked of Oscar.

"As I see you," Oscar replied. "I am a comrade of his son who is almost my age, nineteen, and we go out on horseback together nearly every day."

"Kings have *carried* shepherdesses," Mistigris remarked sententiously.

Pierrotin's winking at old Léger fully reassured the farmer.

"Faith," said the count to Oscar, "I am delighted to find myself in the company of a young man who can speak to me of that personage; I need his protection in a rather serious matter, one in which it would cost him hardly anything to favor me. It concerns a claim against the American government. I will be very glad to get information about Monsieur de Sérizy's character."

"Oh! if you want to succeed," Oscar replied, assuming a malicious air, "don't address yourself to him, but to his wife; he is madly in love with

her, and no one knows better than I to what extent, but his wife cannot endure him."

"And why?" Georges asked.

"The count has skin diseases that make him hideous, which Doctor Alibert is trying in vain to heal. And so Monsieur de Sérizy would give half of his immense fortune to have my chest," said Oscar as he opened his shirt-front and showed a skin like a child's. "He lives alone, retired in his mansion. And so one must be well recommended to find him there. In the first place, he gets up very early in the morning, and works from three to eight o'clock; at eight o'clock he takes his remedies: sulphur or vapor baths. He bakes himself in a sort of iron box, for he always hopes to get well."

"If he stands so well with the king, why can't he touch him?" Georges asked.

"That woman, then, has a cuckold!" said Mistigris.

"The count has promised thirty thousand francs to a famous Scotch physician who is now treating him," said Oscar, continuing.

"But then his wife could not be blamed for taking the best—" said Schinner, who did not finish.

"I really think so," said Oscar. "This poor man is so dried up, so old, that you would think he was about eighty! he is as dry as parchment, and the worst of it is, he feels his position."

"He cannot feel well," said old Léger facetiously.

"He adores his wife, sir, and he dares not chide

her," Oscar continued; "he plays scenes with her that would make you split your sides laughing, precisely like Arnolphe in Molière's comedy—"

The count, downcast, looked at Pierrotin, who, seeing him unmoved, imagined that Madame Clapart's son was retailing calumnies.

"And so, sir, if you would succeed," said Oscar to the count, "go and see the Marquis d'Aiglemont. If you have this old adorer of madame with you, you will with but one stroke gain both the wife and the husband."

"That's what we call 'Killing two birds with one *scone*,'" said Mistigris.

"Ah, there!" said the painter, "you have, then, seen the count in undress, you are, then, his valet de chambre?"

"His valet de chambre!" Oscar exclaimed.

"But, goodness! people don't say such things about their friends in public coaches," Mistigris continued. "'Discretion,' young man, 'is the *wetter* part of valor.' As for me, I am not listening to you."

"It is a case," Schinner exclaimed, "of saying: 'Tell me the company you keep, and I will tell you who you *mar!*'"

"Let me tell you, great painter," Georges replied sententiously, "that one cannot speak ill of people whom one does not know, and the little fellow has just proved to us that he knows his Sérizy by heart. If he had spoken to us merely of madame, one might have believed that he was on good terms with—"

"Not another word about the Comtesse de Sérizy, young men!" the count exclaimed. "I am the friend of her brother, the Marquis de Ronquerolles, and whoever would dare to call the countess's honor in question would have to answer to me for his words."

"The gentleman is right," exclaimed the painter, "one should not joke about women."

"*God, Honor and the Ladies!* I have seen that melodrama," said Mistigris.

"If I do not know Mina, I do know the Keeper of the Seals," said the count, continuing and looking at Georges. "If I do not wear my decorations," he said as he looked at the painter, "I can prevent the giving of any to those who do not merit them. In fine, I know so many people, as I know Monsieur Grindot, the architect of Presles—Stop, Pierrotin, I want to get out for a moment."

Pierrotin drove his horses to the end of the village of Moisselles, where there is an inn at which passengers stop. This part of the journey was made in profound silence.

"To whose house, then, is that funny little fellow going?" the count asked as he led Pierrotin into the court-yard of the inn.

"To your manager's. He is the son of a poor woman who lives in the Rue de la Cerisaie, and to whose house I very often bring fruit, game, poultry, —a certain Madame Husson."

"Who is that gentleman?" old Léger came and asked Pierrotin when the count had left the coach-driver.

"Faith, I know nothing about him," Pierrotin replied, "I am carrying him for the first time; but he may be a somebody, the prince, for instance, to whom belongs the Maffliers château, he has just told me to drop him on the way, he is not going to L'Isle-Adam."

"Pierrotin thinks that he is the rich burgher of Maffliers," old Léger said to Georges as he was getting back into the coach.

At that moment the three young men, stunned as robbers caught in the act, dared not look at one another, and seemed taken up with the sequels of their lies.

"That's what is called 'making more *toys* than work,'" said Mistigris.

"You see that I know the count," Oscar said to them.

"That's possible; but you will never be ambassador," said Georges; "when one wants to talk in public coaches, one must be careful, like me, to talk without saying anything."

"Pride goes before a *wall,*" said Mistigris by way of conclusion.

The count then took his place again, and Pierrotin proceeded in the most profound silence.

"Well, my friends," said the count as they reached the Carreau woods, "we are as mute as if we were going to the scaffold."

"It is necessary to know 'when to *fold* one's tongue,'" Mistigris replied sententiously.

"It's fine weather," said Georges.

"What is that place?" said Oscar as he pointed to the Franconville château, which gives a splendid effect opposite the great Saint-Martin forest.

"What!" the count exclaimed, "you who say you have gone so often to Presles, and you do not know Franconville?"

"The gentleman," said Mistigris, "knows men and not châteaus."

"Diplomats' apprentices may indeed have distractions!" Georges exclaimed.

"Remember my name!" Oscar replied, furious. "I am called Oscar Husson, and, in ten years, I will be famous."

After these words, pronounced braggingly, Oscar huddled up in his corner.

"Husson de What?" Mistigris asked.

"A great family," replied the count, "the Hussons de la Cerisaie: the gentleman was born under the steps of the Imperial throne."

Oscar then blushed to the roots of his hair, and was agitated by a terrible restlessness. They were about to descend the steep hill of La Cave, at the foot of which, in a narrow valley at the end of the great Saint-Martin forest is the magnificent château of Presles.

"Gentlemen," said the count, "I wish you good luck in your fine careers. Get reconciled with the king of France, colonel; the Czerni-Georges ought not to look sour at the Bourbons. I have nothing to prognosticate for you, my dear Monsieur Schinner; glory has already come to you, and you have

nobly achieved it by admirable works;—but you are so much to be feared that, as for me who am married, I would not dare to make you an offer to come to my country-seat. As for Monsieur Husson, he needs no protection, he possesses the secrets of statesmen, he can make them tremble. As for Monsieur Léger, he is going to pluck the Comte de Sérizy, and I have only to ask him to go at it with a strong hand! Let me off here, Pierrotin, you will pick me up again to-morrow!" added the count, who got out, leaving his traveling companions in their confusion.

"The *pace* is to the swift," said Mistigris on seeing the celerity with which the traveler was lost in a sunken lane.

"Oh! he is that count who has rented Franconville; he is going there," said old Léger.

"If ever it happens to me," said the false Schinner, "to joke in a coach, I will fight a duel with myself. That's also your fault, Mistigris," he added, as he slapped his grinder's hat.

"Oh! I, who only followed you to Venice," Mistigris replied. "But 'give a dog a *mad* name and *hang* him.'"

"Do you know," said Georges to his neighbor Oscar, "that, if perchance that was the Comte de Sérizy, I would not want to be in your skin, no matter how free from disease it is."

Oscar, on thinking of his mother's recommendations, which these words recalled, turned pallid and was brought to his senses.

"Here you are at your destination, gentlemen," said Pierrotin as he stopped at a fine gate.

"What, already there?" said the painter, Georges and Oscar in one breath.

"That's pretty hard!" said Pierrotin. "Ah! gentlemen, none of you has ever been this way before? But there's the château of Presles."

"Eh! all right, friend," said Georges, regaining his assurance. "I am going to the Moulineaux farm," he added, not wanting to let his traveling companions see that he was going to the château.

"Well, you are coming to my house, then?" said old Léger.

"How so?"

"Because I am the Moulineaux farmer. And, colonel, what do you want of us?"

"To taste your butter," Georges replied as he picked up his portfolio.

"Pierrotin," said Oscar, "leave my baggage at the manager's, I am going direct to the château."

Whereupon Oscar dashed into a lane, not knowing whither he was going.

"Hey! ambassador," old Léger exclaimed, "you're going into the forest. If you want to enter the château, then take the small gate."

Obliged to enter, Oscar was lost in the great court of the château, furnished with an immense flower-bed surrounded by stakes connected with chains. Whilst old Léger was examining Oscar, Georges, who was struck dumb by the character of the Moulineaux farmer assumed by the big husbandman,

escaped so neatly that at the moment when the puzzled fat man looked for his colonel, he was no longer able to find him. The gate was opened at Pierrotin's request, and he entered proudly to give to the gate-keeper the great Schinner's thousand and one utensils. Oscar was dumfounded on seeing Mistigris and the artist, the witnesses to his bravado, installed in the château. In ten minutes, Pierrotin had finished unloading the painter's packages, Oscar Husson's things, and the pretty little leather trunk, which he entrusted mysteriously to the gate-keeper's wife; then he retraced his steps as he cracked his whip, and continued on the road through the L'Isle-Adam forest, keeping on his countenance the bantering expression of a peasant figuring up his profits. No longer was there anything wanting to his happiness, he was to have his thousand francs next day.

Oscar, looking sheepish, dodged around the flower-bed, seeking to learn what was to become of his two traveling companions, when he suddenly saw Monsieur Moreau emerging from the great hall called that of *the guards*, at the top of the front steps. Clad in a big blue overcoat that reached down to his heels, the manager, in yellowish leather breeches, and riding boots, held a short whip in his hand.

"Well, my boy, here you are, then? How is your dear mamma?" he said as he clasped Oscar's hand. "Good-day, gentlemen; you are no doubt the painters who Monsieur Grindot, the architect,

told us were coming?" said he to the painter and Mistigris.

He whistled twice, making use of the end of his whip. The gate-keeper came.

"Show these gentlemen to rooms 14 and 15, Madame Moreau will give you the keys; accompany them so as to show them the way; light a fire, if necessary, this evening, and send their baggage up to their rooms. I have orders from the count to offer you my table, gentlemen," he continued, addressing the artists; "we dine at five o'clock, just as at Paris. If you are huntsmen you can amuse yourselves very well, for I have the freedom of the rivers and forests: thus there is hunting here in twelve thousand acres of woods, to say nothing of our domains."

Oscar, the painter and Mistigris, equally abashed, exchanged looks; but, faithful to his part, Mistigris exclaimed:

"Bah! one must never 'throw the handle after the *latchet!*' ever onward."

Little Husson followed the manager, who led him away at a rapid stride into the park.

"Jacques," he said to one of his children, "go and tell your mother that little Husson has arrived, and say to her that I am obliged to go to the Molineaux for a moment."

Then about fifty years old, the manager, a man of medium height and of brown complexion, seemed very stern. His bilious countenance, on which country habits had impressed strong colors, led, at

first sight, to suppose a character different from his. Everything contributed to this false impression: his hair was turning gray; his blue eyes and a large crow-beaked nose gave him an air so much the more sinister as his eyes were a little too close to the nose; but his large lips, the contour of his face, the ease of his gait, would have struck an observer as marks of goodness. Full of decision, blunt in speech, he made an immense impression on Oscar in consequence of a penetration inspired by tenderness, which he showed toward him. Accustomed by his mother to make the manager even a bigger man than he was, Oscar always felt himself small in Moreau's presence; but on finding himself at Presles, he felt a sensation of uneasiness, as if he expected evil from this paternal friend, his sole protector.

"Well, my Oscar, you do not look as if you were satisfied with being here?" said the manager. "You are going, however, to be amused here; you will learn to ride horseback, to handle a gun, to hunt."

"I know nothing of all that," Oscar said stupidly.

"But I have brought you here to teach you."

"Mamma told me to remain only a fortnight, because of Madame Moreau—"

"Oh! we will see," Moreau replied, almost hurt at Oscar having expressed a doubt as to his conjugal power.

Moreau's younger son, a lad of fifteen, almost a strapping fellow, and lithe, ran to them.

"Here," his father said to him, "take this comrade to your mother."

And the manager went rapidly along the shortest path to the caretaker's, situated between the park and the forest.

The pavilion, given as a dwelling by the count to his manager, had been built some years before the Revolution, by the contractor of the famous estate of Cassan, where Bergeret, a farmer-general of colossal wealth, who made himself as famous by his high living as did the Bodards, the Pârises, the Bourets, made gardens and rivers, built hermitages, pagodas and other ruinous splendors.

This pavilion, situated in the middle of a large garden, one of the walls of which was a party-wall for the court of the Presles château commons, formerly had its entrance on the main street of the village. After having bought this property, the elder Monsieur de Sérizy had only to pull down this wall and condemn the gate leading to the village so as to bring about the connecting of this pavilion with his commons. By removing another wall he enlarged his park to the extent of all the garden that the contractor had acquired, so as to round out his property. This pavilion, built of cut stone, in the style of the time of Louis XV.—suffice it to say that its ornaments consist of *serviettes* under the windows, as in the colonnades of the Place Louis XV., of stiff and dry flutings,—is made up of a ground floor having a handsome parlor communicating with a bedroom, and of a dining-room with a

billiard hall adjoining it. These two parallel suites of rooms are separated by a stairway in front of which a sort of peristyle, which serves as an antechamber, has the two opposite doors of the salon and dining-room, both highly ornamented, as the decorative feature. The kitchen is under the dining-room, for one ascends to this pavilion by ten steps.

By removing her living rooms to the second floor, Madame Moreau had been able to change the old sleeping-room into a boudoir. The salon and this boudoir, richly furnished with fine things picked out from among the old furniture of the château, would certainly not have disparaged the mansion of a woman of fashion. Hung with blue and white damask, formerly the drapery of a grand bed of honor, this parlor, the furniture of which was of old gilt wood upholstered with the same material, presented to the eye very ample curtains and portières, lined with white taffeta. Scenes that had belonged to old panels that were destroyed, flower-pots, some pretty pieces of modern furniture and beautiful lamps, besides an old sconce with cut crystals, gave an appearance of grandeur to this room. The carpet was an ancient Persian rug. The boudoir, entirely modern and in Madame Moreau's own taste, affected the form of a tent with its cords of blue silk on a gray linen ground. The classic divan was found there, with its pillows and foot-cushions. Finally, the flower-pots, cared for by the gardener-in-chief, delighted the eye by their pyramids of flowers,

The dining-room and billiard hall were furnished in mahogany. Around her pavilion, the manager's wife had had a grassplot arranged and kept carefully cultivated, that was connected with the great park. Clumps of exotic trees concealed the commons from view. To facilitate entrance to her house for persons who came to see her, the manager's wife had replaced the old condemned gate by a grille.

The dependence in which their position put the Moreaus was, then, adroitly dissembled; and they had so much the more the appearance of being rich people, managing a friend's property for their own pleasure, that neither the count nor the countess came to lower their pretensions; then the concessions granted by Monsieur de Sérizy allowed them to live in that abundance, the luxury of country life. Thus milk, eggs, poultry, game, fruit, fodder, flowers, wood, and vegetables, the manager and his wife cultivated even to profusion and bought nothing indeed but butcher's meat, wines and the colonial provisions required by their princely life. The farm-yard girl did the baking. In fine, for some years past, Moreau paid the butcher with pigs from his yard, while keeping what was necessary for his own consumption. One day the countess, always most favorably disposed to her former chambermaid, gave her, as a reminder, perhaps, a small road-wagon that had gone out of date, which Moreau had repainted, and in which he paraded his wife, making use of two good horses, useful, moreover,

for work in the park. Besides these horses, the manager had his saddle horse. He ploughed in the park and cultivated enough land to support his horses and his dependents; he trussed there three hundred thousand pounds of excellent hay, and counted only one hundred, taking advantage of a permission vaguely accorded by the count. Instead of consuming it, he disposed of his half in barter. He mainly supported his yard, his pigeon-roost and his cows at the expense of the park; but the manure from his stable served the castle gardeners. Each of these little thefts brought its excuse with it. Madame was waited on in turn by the daughter of one of the gardeners, her chambermaid and her cook. A farm-yard girl, entrusted with the dairy, also assisted in the housework. Moreau had taken a reformed soldier, named Brochon, to clean his horses and do the rough work.

At Nerville, at Chauvry, at Beaumont, at Maffliers, at Prérolles, at Nointel, everywhere, the manager's pretty wife was received by persons who did not know or feigned not to know her former condition. Besides, Moreau rendered services. He disposed of his master's goods for things that are baubles at Paris, but that are highly prized in the rural districts. After having dictated the appointment of the justice of the peace at Beaumont and also at L'Isle-Adam, he had, in the same year, prevented the removal of a general caretaker of forests, and obtained the Cross of the Legion of Honor for the quartermaster-in-chief of Beaumont. And so

on every festal occasion among the middle-class, Monsieur and Madame Moreau never failed to be invited. The pastor of Presles and the mayor of Presles came to play cards every evening at Moreau's. It is hard not to be a worthy man after having made so comfortable a berth for one's self.

A pretty woman, and conceited like all chambermaids to great ladies, who when they get married imitate their mistresses, the manager's wife imported new fashions into the country; she wore very expensive laced boots, and went on foot only on fine days. Though her husband allowed only five hundred francs for toilet, this sum is enormous in the country, especially when it is judiciously used; and so the manager's wife, blonde, bright and fresh, about thirty-six years old, remaining spare, delicate and genteel, in spite of her three children, still played the young girl and put on the airs of a princess. When one saw her passing in her road-wagon on her way to Beaumont, if any stranger asked: "Who is she?" Madame Moreau was furious when a countryman answered: "She is the wife of the manager of Presles." She liked to be taken for the mistress of the château. In the villages she was pleased to patronize people, as a great lady would have done. Her husband's influence over the count, demonstrated by so many proofs, prevented the lesser middle-class from making fun of Madame Moreau, who, in the eyes of the peasantry, seemed a somebody. Estelle—her name was

Estelle—no more concerned herself, besides, with the management than a broker's wife concerns herself with Bourse affairs; she even depended on her husband for the cares of housekeeping, of fortune. Confident *in his abilities*, she was a thousand leagues from suspecting that this charming life, which had lasted for seventeen years past, could ever be menaced; yet, on learning of the count's resolve in regard to the restoration of the magnificent château of Presles, she felt that this threatened all her enjoyments, and had persuaded her husband to have an understanding with Léger so as to be able to retire to L'Isle-Adam. She would have suffered too much on finding herself in a quasi-domestic dependence in presence of her former mistress, who would make fun of her on seeing her established in the pavilion in such a way as to ape the life of a really fashionable woman.

The cause of the deep enmity that raged between the Reyberts and the Moreaus came from a wound inflicted by Madame de Reybert on Madame Moreau, in consequence of a first caviling that the manager's wife had allowed herself to indulge in on the arrival of the Reyberts, so as not to let her supremacy suffer from a woman whose maiden name was De Corroy.

Madame de Reybert had recalled, perhaps had told all the country of Madame Moreau's former condition. The word *chambermaid!* flew from mouth to mouth. Those envious persons that the Moreaus must have had at Beaumont, L'Isle-Adam, Maffliers,

Champagne, Nerville, Chauvry, Baillet, and Moisselles, carped so well that more than one spark from this conflagration fell on the Moreau household. For four years past the Reyberts, excommunicated by the manager's pretty wife, saw themselves the object of so much animadversion on the part of the adherents of Moreau, that their position in the country was not bearable without the thought of revenge that had kept them up until this day.

The Moreaus, standing very well with Grindot, the architect, had been notified by him of the approaching arrival of a painter, entrusted with completing the ornamental painting of the château, the chief canvases of which had just been executed by Schinner. The great painter had recommended for the borderings, arabesques and other accessories, the passenger who was accompanied by Mistigris. And so, for two days past, Madame Moreau had put herself on war footing and danced attendance. An artist, who was to be her guest for a few weeks, called for some outlay. Schinner and his wife had had their rooms in the château, where, in accordance with the count's orders, they were treated like Her Ladyship herself. Grindot, who took his meals with the Moreaus, showed so much respect for the great artist that neither the manager nor his wife had dared to be familiar with this great artist. The noblest and richest private families of the neighborhood had, moreover, emulated one another in feasting Schinner and his wife, so far indeed, as to dispute about them. And so,

quite bent on taking her revenge to some extent, Madame Moreau made up her mind to trumpet throughout the country the artist whom she was expecting, and to represent him as Schinner's equal in talent.

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Though, on the two previous days, Madame Moreau had made two toilets full of affectation, the manager's pretty wife had too well planned her resources not to have reserved the most charming, having no doubt but that the artist would come to dinner on Saturday. She had accordingly put on bronzed kid laced shoes and Scotch thread stockings. A myriad-striped rose dress, a rose belt with a richly chased gold buckle, a cross hung by a velvet ribbon around her neck and velvet bracelets on her bare arms—Madame de Sérizy had fine arms and showed them a great deal,—gave to Madame Moreau the appearance of an elegant Parisian lady. She wore a magnificent Leghorn hat, adorned with a bouquet of moss roses got at Nattier's, and under the brim of which her fine blonde hair waved in brilliant tresses. After having ordered the most delicate dinner and inspected her rooms, she had taken a walk so as to get in front of the flower-bed in the grand court of the château, as if she were its mistress, when the coaches were passing. She held over her head a most dainty rose parasol lined with white silk, fringed. On seeing Pierrotin, who was depositing the odd packages brought by Mistigris, in the château gate-house without any passenger making his appearance, Estelle returned disappointed, regretting the making of a second useless

toilet. Like most persons when they put on their Sunday costume, she felt herself incapable of any other occupation than that of lolling in her parlor while waiting for the Beaumont coach, which would pass an hour after Pierrotin, though it left Paris only at one o'clock in the afternoon, and she returned to her house while the two artists proceeded to make a regulation toilet. The young painter and Mistigris were indeed so overcome by the praises that the gardener bestowed on the pretty Madame Moreau, after they had asked him for information, that both of them felt the necessity of *trimming* themselves up—in the language of the workshop,—and they put on their very best dress before presenting themselves at the manager's pavilion, whither they were shown the way by Jacques Moreau, the eldest of the children, a bold youth dressed after the English fashion in a pretty vest with turned-down collar, and living during vacation like a fish in water, on that estate where his mother reigned as absolute sovereign.

"Mamma," he said, "here are the two artists sent by Monsieur Schinner."

Madame Moreau, very agreeably surprised, arose, had seats brought by her son, and showed off her graces.

"Mamma, little Husson is with papa," the child added, whispering in his mother's ear, "I am going to seek him for you—"

"You need be in no hurry, amuse yourselves together," the mother said.

This single expression, *you need be in no hurry*, gave the two artists to understand of how little importance was their traveling companion; but there entered into it also the feeling of a step-mother for a step-son. Indeed, Madame Moreau, who could not, after seventeen years of married life, be ignorant of the manager's attachment to Madame Clapart and little Husson, hated both the mother and the child in so pronounced a way that one will understand why the manager had not yet risked having Oscar come to Presles.

"We have been instructed, my husband and myself," she said to the two artists, "to do you the honors of the château. We are very fond of the arts, and especially artists," she added with a winning smile, "and I entreat you to make yourselves perfectly at home here. In the country, you know, one is not stiff; it is necessary to have full liberty there; without that, everything there is insipid. We have already had Monsieur Schinner—"

Mistigris looked mischievously at his companion.

"No doubt you know him?" Estelle continued after a pause.

"Who does not know him, madame?" the painter replied.

"He is as well known *as hops*," Mistigris added.

"Monsieur Grindot has told me your name," Madame Moreau remarked, "but I—"

"Joseph Bridau," replied the painter, who was extremely concerned to know with what woman he was dealing.

Mistigris began to rebel internally against the patronizing tone of the manager's pretty wife; but he waited, as did Bridau, for some action, some word, that would enlighten him, one of those words *de singe à dauphin* that painters, those cruel natural-born observers of the ridiculous,—the food of their crayons,—so readily lay hold of. And in the first place, Estelle's large hands and large feet, characteristic of the peasant girls of the Saint-Lô neighborhood, struck the two artists; then one or two chambermaid phrases, turns of speech that belied the elegance of toilet, readily enabled the painter and his pupil to recognize their prey; and, by exchanging a single glance, both agreed to take Estelle seriously, so as to spend the time of their sojourn agreeably.

"You like the arts, perhaps you cultivate them successfully, madame?" said Joseph Bridau.

"No. Without being neglected, my education was purely commercial; but I have so profound and so delicate a feeling for the arts that Monsieur Schinner always entreated me to come, when he had finished a piece, to give him my opinion."

"As Molière consulted Laforêt," said Mistigris.

Not knowing that Laforêt was a servant girl, Madame Moreau replied with a bow which showed that, in her ignorance, she accepted this phrase as a compliment.

"How was it he didn't offer to sketch you?" said Bridau. "Painters are rather sweet on pretty women."

"What do you mean by these words?" remarked Madame Moreau, on whose countenance was pictured the wrath of an offended queen.

"In studio language, we call sketching a head, making an outline of it," said Mistigris with an insinuating air, "and we do not ask to sketch any but pretty heads. Whence the expression, *she is pretty to paint!*"

"I was ignorant of the origin of this term," she replied as she gave Mistigris one of the softest of glances.

"My pupil," said Bridau, "Monsieur Léon de Lora, shows a strong disposition for portrait painting. He would be only too happy, *fair lady*, to leave you a reminder of our stay here by painting your charming head."

Joseph Bridau made a sign to Mistigris as if to say:

"Come, push your point! She is not quite so bad, this woman isn't." At this glance Léon de Lora glided over to the sofa, close to Estelle, and took hold of her hand, which was not withdrawn.

"Oh! if, to give *your husband* a surprise, madame, you would give me a few sittings in secret, I would try to surpass myself. You are so beautiful, so fresh, so charming!—An untalented man would become a genius by having you for a model! One would derive from your eyes so much—"

"Then we will paint your dear children in the arabesques," said Joseph, interrupting Mistigris.

"I would prefer to have them in my parlor; but

that would be indiscreet," she continued, as she looked at Bridau in a coquettish way.

"Beauty, madame, is a sovereign that painters adore, and that has many rights over them."

"They are charming," Madame Moreau thought. "Do you like riding around of an evening, after dinner, in a road-wagon, in the woods?"

"Oh! oh! oh! oh! oh!" exclaimed Mistigris at each circumstance and in ecstatic tones; "but Presles will be the earthly paradise."

"With an Eve, a blonde, a young and charming woman," Bridau added.

Just as Madame Moreau bridled up and floated in the seventh heaven, she was brought to herself, like a kite by a pull of the cord.

"Madame!" exclaimed her chambermaid as she entered like a ball.

"Well, Rosalie, who, then, could authorize you to come here without being called?"

Rosalie took no notice of the apostrophe, and whispered in her mistress's ear:

"The count is at the château."

"Does he want me?" the manager's wife replied.

"No, madame—But—he wants his trunk and the key of his rooms."

"Let him have them, then," she said, giving a sign of temper so as to conceal her anxiety.

"Mamma, this is Oscar Husson!" the younger of her sons exclaimed as he led in Oscar, who, red as a corn-poppy, did not dare to advance when he found the two painters in toilet.

"Here you are at last, then, my little Oscar," said Estelle with a forced expression. "I hope you are going to dress," she continued after having examined him in the most contemptuous way. "Your mother did not, I think, accustom you to dine in company jumbled together as you are now."

"Oh!" said Mistigris cruelly, "a future diplomat ought to be *well-seated*—as to trousers.* 'Two coats are better than *won.*' "

"A future diplomat?" Madame Moreau exclaimed.

At that, poor Oscar had tears in his eyes as he looked in turn at Joseph and Léon.

"A pleasantry perpetrated on the journey," replied Joseph, who from pity, wanted to save Oscar from this false step.

"The little fellow wanted to laugh as we did, and he joked," said the cruel Mistigris; "now here he is, 'like an ass in *Dover.*' "

"Madame," said Rosalie as she returned to the parlor door, "His Excellency orders dinner for eight persons, and wishes it served at six o'clock. What's to be done?"

During the conference between Estelle and her head servant, the two artists and Oscar exchanged looks in which frightful fears were depicted.

"His Excellency! who?" said Joseph Bridau.

"Only the Comte de Sérizy," little Moreau replied.

*This phrase cannot be intelligently translated into English. The original reads: *en fonds de culotte* (in seats—of breeches) *en fonds* is generally equivalent to *in funds.*

"Was he perchance in the cuckoo?" said Léon de Lora.

"Oh!" remarked Oscar, "the Comte de Sérizy would travel only in a carriage with four horses."

"How did the Comte de Sérizy come?" the painter asked of Madame Moreau when she returned to her place rather mortified.

"I know nothing about it," she said, "I cannot explain His Lordship's arrival, nor what he comes to do. And Moreau is not there!"

"His Excellency begs Monsieur Schinner to go over to the château," said a gardener addressing Joseph, "and he begs him to give him the pleasure of dining with him, as well as Monsieur Mistigris."

"We're done for," said the grinder, laughing. "He whom we took for a burgher in the Pierrotin coach is the count. One is right in saying that *one never binds* what one seeks."

Oscar changed almost into a statue of salt; for at this revelation, he felt his gullet salter than the sea.

"And you who spoke to him of his wife's adorers and his secret malady!" said Mistigris to Oscar.

"What do you mean?" the manager's wife exclaimed, as she looked at the two artists, who went off laughing at Oscar's appearance.

Oscar remained mute, thunderstruck, stupefied, deaf to everything, though Madame Moreau questioned him and shook him violently by that one of his arms which she had taken hold of and which she pinched hard; but she was obliged to leave

Oscar in her parlor without having got any reply from him, for Rosalie called her again to get linen and silverware, and for her to watch herself over the carrying out of the multiplied orders that the count gave. The hands, the gardeners, the gatekeeper and his wife, everybody was going and coming in a state of confusion that may be easily imagined. The master had fallen among them like a bomb. From the top of La Cave the count had, indeed, by a path with which he was familiar, reached his caretaker's house, and had arrived there long before Moreau. The caretaker was dumfounded on seeing the real master.

"Is Moreau there, isn't that his horse?" Monsieur de Sérizy asked.

"No, my lord; but, as he has to go to the Moulineaux before dinner, he has left his horse here in the meantime while he is giving some orders at the château."

The caretaker did not know the bearing of this reply, which, in the present circumstances, to the perception of a clear-sighted man, was equivalent to a certainty.

"If you value your place," said the count to the caretaker, "you will go in hot haste to Beaumont on this horse, and you will give to Monsieur Margueron the note that I am going to write."

The count entered the pavilion, wrote a few words, folded the note so that it was impossible to unfold it without detection, and gave it to his caretaker as soon as he saw him in the saddle.

"Not a word to a living soul!" he said. "As for you, madame," he added speaking to the caretaker's wife, "if Moreau be surprised at not finding his horse, you will tell him that I took it."

And the count hurried into his park, the gate of which was at once opened for him at a sign that he gave.

No matter how broken up one may be by the turmoil of politics, by his own emotions, or by his miscalculations, the soul of a man strong enough still to love at the count's age is always young to treason. So much did it cost Monsieur de Sérizy to find he had been deceived by Moreau, that at Saint-Brice he believed him less the accomplice of Léger and the notary than their tool. And so, on the inn doorstep, while old Léger and the innkeeper were in conversation, he still thought of pardoning his manager, after having given him a salutary rebuke. Strange to say, his confidential man's felony occupied his thoughts only as an episode, from the moment when Oscar had revealed the glorious infirmities of the intrepid worker, the administrator under Napoléon. Secrets so well kept could have been betrayed only by Moreau, who no doubt had spoken disparagingly of his benefactor to Madame de Sérizy's former chambermaid or to the former Aspasia of the Directory. As he rushed into the cross path, that peer of France, that Minister, had wept as children weep. He had shed his last tears! All the human feelings were so directly and so bitterly attacked at the same time,

that this remarkably calm man walked in his park like a wounded deer.

When Moreau asked for his horse, the caretaker's wife answered:

"The count has just taken it."

"Who, the count?" he exclaimed.

"His Lordship, le Comte de Sérizy, our master," she said. "He is probably at the château by this time," she added so as to get rid of the manager, who, not at all understanding this event, bent his steps toward the château.

Moreau soon turned back to question the caretaker's wife, for he had concluded that there was something serious in his master's secret arrival and odd conduct. The caretaker's wife, frightened at seeing herself caught, as it were, in a vise between the count and the manager, had closed the pavilion and shut herself up in it, firmly resolved to open it only to her husband. Moreau, growing more restless every moment, went, despite his boots, at a running pace to the gate-house, where he at last learned that the count was dressing. Rosalie, whom the manager met, said to him:

"Seven persons to dine with His Lordship—"

Moreau directed his course towards his pavilion, and then saw his farm-yard girl in altercation with a handsome young man.

"The count said: 'Mina's aide-de-camp, a colonel!' " the poor girl exclaimed.

"I'm not a colonel," Georges replied.

"Well, your name is Georges?"

"What's the matter there?" said the manager, intervening.

"Sir, my name is Georges Marest, I am the son of a rich wholesale hardware merchant in the Rue Saint-Martin, and have come on business with the Comte de Sérizy, representing Master Crottat, notary, whose second clerk I am."

"And as for me, I repeat to the gentleman that His Lordship has just said to me: 'A colonel is about to present himself; his name is Czerni-Georges, aide-de-camp to Mina; he came on the Pierrotin coach; if he asks for me, show him into the waiting parlor.'"

"You mustn't bandy words with His Lordship," said the manager; "go, sir. But why did His Lordship come here without having notified me of his arrival? How could the count have known that you have traveled in the Pierrotin coach?"

"Evidently," said the clerk, "the count is the passenger who, if a young man had not obliged him, was going to share the driver's seat of the Pierrotin coach."

"The driver's seat of the Pierrotin coach?" the manager and the farm-yard girl exclaimed.

"I am sure of it, precisely because of what this girl has told me," Georges Marest continued.

"And why?" remarked Moreau.

"Ah! in this way," exclaimed the clerk. "So as to mystify the passengers, I spun them a lot of yarns about Egypt, Greece and Spain. I had on spurs, I represented myself as a cavalry colonel, a laughable story."

"Let us see," said Moreau. "What does the passenger look like who, in your opinion, is the count?"

"Well," said Georges, "he has a face like a brick, entirely white hair and black eyebrows."

"It is he!"

"I am ruined!" said Georges Marest.

"Why?"

"I teased him about his decorations."

"Bah! he is too good-natured, you only amused him. Come at once to the château," said Moreau, "I am going up to see His Lordship. Where, then, did the count leave you?"

"On the top of the hill."

"I am ruined," Moreau exclaimed.

"After all, I humbugged him, but I did not insult him," the clerk said to himself.

"And why have you come?" the manager asked.

"Well, I bring the deed of sale for the Moulineaux farm, all ready."

"My God!" the manager exclaimed, "I can't understand it."

Moreau felt his heart beat so as to pain him when, after having knocked twice on his master's door, he heard:

"Is that you, *Monsieur* Moreau?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Come in!"

The count had put on white trousers and fine boots, a white waistcoat and a black coat on which shone, on the right side, the star of the

Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor; on the left, from a buttonhole, hung the Golden Fleece at the end of a gold chain. The blue ribbon was very conspicuous on the waistcoat. He had arranged his hair himself, and had no doubt thus harnessed himself in order to do the honors of Presles to Margueron and perhaps to make the prestige of greatness have its effect on this good man.

"Well, sir," said the count as he remained seated and left Moreau standing, "we cannot come to terms with Margueron, then?"

"At present he would sell his farm too high."

"But why wouldn't he come?" said the count, affecting a dreamy air.

"He is sick, my lord—"

"You're sure of that?"

"I've been there—"

"Sir," said the count as he assumed a severe tone that was terrible, "what would you do to a trusted man who would see you dressing a sore that you keep secret, if he went and made it a matter of jest to a strumpet?"

"I would knock him down."

"And if you saw, besides, that he is deceiving your confidence and robbing you?"

"I would try to take him by surprise and would send him to the galleys."

"Listen, *Monsieur* Moreau! you have undoubtedly spoken of my infirmities at Madame Clapart's, and you have laughed in her house, with her, at my love for the Comtesse de Sérizy; for, this morning,

little Husson informed the passengers in a public coach of a multitude of circumstances relative to my remedies, in my presence, and God knows in what language! He dared to calumniate my wife. In fine, I learned from old Léger's own lips, as he was returning from Paris in the Pierrotin coach, the plan formed by the Beaumont notary, by you and by himself, relative to the Moulineaux. If you have been to Monsieur Margueron's, it was to tell him to play sick; he is so slightly so that I am expecting him to dinner, and that he will come. Well, sir, I have forgiven you for having a fortune of two hundred and fifty thousand francs, saved in seventeen years—I understand that. You might have asked each time for what you have taken from me, or what was offered to you, and I would have given it to you: you are the father of a family. You were, in your indelicacy, better than some one else, I do believe—But, you who know the work that I have done for the country, for France, you have seen me sitting up a hundred and some odd nights for the Emperor, or working eighteen hours a day for three whole months at a time; you who know how much I love Madame de Sérizy, to have gabbled about it before a child, to have exposed my secrets, my affection, to the ridicule of a Madame Husson—"

"My lord—"

"It is unpardonable. To injure a man in his interests is nothing; but to attack him in his heart! —Oh! you do not know what you have done!"

The count put his head between his hands and remained silent for a moment.

"I leave you what you have," he continued, "and I will forget you. For dignity's sake, for me, for your own honor, we will part in peace, for I recall at this moment what your father did for mine. You will arrange matters, and satisfactorily, with Monsieur de Reybert, who succeeds you. Be calm, as I am. Do not make a silly show of yourself. Especially, no scolding and no trifling. If you no longer have my confidence, try to observe the decorum of rich folks. As for that little idiot who came near killing me, he must not sleep at Presles! send him to the inn, I would not answer for my wrath were I to see him."

"I did not deserve such mild treatment, my lord," said Moreau with tears in his eyes. "Yes, if I had been thoroughly dishonest, I would have five hundred thousand francs to myself; besides, I offer to give you an account of my fortune, and to explain it to you in detail! But let me tell you, my lord, that when talking about you to Madame Clapart, it was never in derision, but, on the contrary, to deplore your condition, and to ask her if she did not know of some remedies, unknown to the physicians, that are in use among the lower classes—I conversed about your feelings in the presence of the little fellow when he was asleep—it appears that he was listening to us,—but it was always in terms full of affection and respect. Misfortune wills that indiscretions be punished as crimes. But, while I accept

the effects of your just wrath, know at least how things happened. Oh! it was as between heart and heart that I spoke of you to Madame Clapart. In fine, you may question my wife, we have never spoken of these things to one another—"

"Enough," said the count, who was thoroughly convinced, "we are not children; everything is irrevocable. Go and put your affairs and mine in order. You can remain in the pavilion until October. Monsieur and Madame de Reybert will lodge in the château; especially, try to live with them like decent folk, who hate each other but keep up appearances."

The count and Moreau went down, Moreau as white as the count's hair, the count calm and dignified.

During this scene, the Beaumont coach that left Paris at one o'clock had stopped at the gate and let out for the château Master Crottat, who, in accordance with the order given by the count, was waiting in the parlor, where he found his clerk exceedingly crestfallen, in company with the two painters, all three of them embarrassed by their impersonations. Monsieur de Reybert, a man of fifty with snappish countenance, had come accompanied by old Margueron and the Beaumont notary, who was holding a pile of documents and titles. When all these personages saw the count make his appearance in statesman's costume, Georges Marest had a slight feeling of colic, Joseph Bridau jumped; but Mistigris, who was in his Sunday clothes and who,

moreover, had nothing to reproach himself with, said in a rather loud voice:

"Well, he is infinitely better like that."

"Funny little man," said the count as he pulled him to him by the ear, "both of us are doing some decorating. Have you recognized your work, my dear Schinner?" the count continued as he called the artist's attention to the ceiling.

"My lord," the artist replied, "I was wrong in arrogating a famous name to myself out of bravado; but this day obliges me to do some fine work for you and to make the name of Joseph Bridau famous."

"You took my part," the count said in an animated way, "and I hope that you will give me the pleasure of dining with me, as well as our witty Mistigris."

"Your Lordship does not know to what you are exposing yourself," said the cheeky grinder. "'A hungry *felly* has no ears.'"

"Bridau!" the minister exclaimed as if struck by a remembrance, "are you related to one of the most ardent workers under the Empire, a head of a division who fell a victim to his zeal?"

"His son, my lord," Joseph replied, bowing.

"You are welcome here," the count replied as he took the painter's hand in both his own; "I knew your father, and you may count on me as on an— American uncle," Monsieur de Sérizy added, smiling. "But you are too young to have pupils: to whom, then, does Mistigris belong?"

"To my friend Schinner, who has loaned him to

me," Joseph continued. "Mistigris's name is Léon de Lora. My lord, if you remember my father, deign to think of that one of his sons who is accused of a plot against the State and brought before the Court of Peers—"

"Ah! true," said the count; "I will think of that, depend upon it. As for Prince Czerni-Georges, Ali Pasha's friend, Mina's aide-de-camp," said the count as he advanced towards Georges.

"He?—my second clerk!" Crottat exclaimed.

"You are in error, Master Crottat," said the count in a severe tone. "A clerk who wants some day to be a notary does not leave important documents in stage-coaches at the mercy of the passengers! a clerk who wants to be a notary does not spend twenty francs between Paris and Moisselles! a clerk who wants to be a notary does not expose himself to being arrested as a deserter—"

"My lord," said Georges Marest, "I was able to amuse myself by mystifying bourgeois on a journey; but—"

"Now let His Excellency speak," his employer said to him as he gave him a violent elbow nudge in the ribs.

"A notary ought early in life to have discretion, prudence, shrewdness, and not to take a Minister of State for a chandler—"

"I confess my faults and am sorry for them, but I did not leave my papers at the mercy—" said Georges.

"You are at this moment committing the fault of

giving the lie to a Minister of State, to a peer of France, to a gentleman, to an old man, to a client. Look for your bill of sale!"

The clerk rumpled all the papers in his portfolio.

"Don't disarrange your papers," said the Minister of State as he drew the deed from his pocket, "here's what you're looking for."

Three times did Crottat turn over the paper, so surprised was he at having received it from his noble client's hands.

"How is this, sir?" the notary at last said to Georges.

"If I had not taken it," the count added, "old Léger, who is not so dumb as you would judge him to be from his questions on agriculture, for he proved to you that every one should stick to his trade—old Léger might have got hold of it and seen through my plan—You will also do me the favor of dining with me, but on condition that you tell us of the execution of the *mucelim* of Smyrna, and you will finish for us the memoirs of some client that you have no doubt read in public."

"A whip for a quip," said Léon de Lora in a very low voice to Joseph Bridau.

"Gentlemen," said the count to the Beaumont notary, Crottat, and Messieurs Margueron and De Reybert, "let us go over to the other side, we will not sit down to table without having finished; for, as my friend Mistigris says: 'one should know how to *fold* one's tongue at the right time.'"

"Well, he is a rather good-natured chap," said Léon de Lora to Georges Marest.

"Yes, but my employer is not so, not he, and he will ask me to go and joke somewhere else."

"Bah! you like to travel," said Bridau.

"What a lathering the little fellow is going to get from Monsieur and Madame Moreau!" Léon de Lora exclaimed.

"A little imbecile," said Georges. "Without him the count would have been amused. It is all the same, the lesson is a good one, and if ever anyone again catches me talking in a coach!"

"Oh! it's very stupid," said Joseph Bridau.

"And vulgar," remarked Mistigris. "*Talking too much follows,* moreover."

While business was being transacted between Monsieur Margueron and the Comte de Sérizy, each assisted by his notary, and in the presence of Monsieur de Reybert, the ex-manager had gone at a slow pace to his pavilion. He entered it without seeing anything and sat down on the parlor sofa, where little Husson was crouched in a corner out of sight, for the pallid countenance of his mother's protector frightened him.

"Well, my dear," said Estelle as she entered rather jaded by what she had just done, "what ails you, then?"

"My dear, we are ruined, and lost beyond recovery. No longer am I manager of Presles! the count's confidence has been withdrawn!"

"And whence comes—?"

"Old Léger, who was in Pierrotin's coach, gave him to understand all about the Moulineaux affair; but that is not what has alienated his protection from me forever—"

"What, then?"

"Oscar has spoken badly of the countess, and has revealed the ailments of monsieur—"

"Oscar?" Madame Moreau exclaimed. "You are punished, my dear, by that wherein you sinned. It was indeed the trouble of nourishing that serpent within your bosom? How often have I told you—"

"Enough!" remarked Moreau in a trembling voice.

At that moment, Estelle and her husband discovered Oscar huddled in a corner. Moreau pounced on the unfortunate youth like a vulture on its prey, grabbed him by the collar of his littel olive overcoat and brought him out into the light of a window.

"Speak! what did you say, then, to His Lordship in the coach? what demon unloosed your tongue, and you remain as if stupefied at every question I ask you? What was your idea?" the manager said to him in a terrible state of violence.

Too much amazed to weep, Oscar kept silent and remained immovable as a statue.

"Come and ask His Excellency's pardon!" said Moreau.

"Can His Excellency be disturbed by such vermin?" exclaimed Estelle, furious.

"Get up, come to the château!" Moreau continued.

Oscar sank like an inert mass and fell to the floor.

"Will you come!" said Moreau, whose wrath became more intense every moment.

"No! no! pardon!" exclaimed Oscar, who did not want to submit to a punishment more galling to him than death.

Moreau then took Oscar by his coat, dragged him as if he were a corpse through the courtyards, which the lad filled with his cries and sobs; he dragged him up the steps, and with an arm made stronger by rage, he threw him bellowing and stiff as a stake, into the parlor, at the feet of the count, who had just concluded the acquisition of the Moulineaux, and who was then betaking himself to the dining-room along with the entire company.

"On your knees! on your knees! you wretch! Ask pardon of him who has given you the bread of life by obtaining a scholarship for you in the college!" Moreau exclaimed.

Oscar, with his face against the floor, was fuming with rage and saying not a word. All the spectators trembled. Moreau, who no longer contained himself, presented a face suffused with blood that his passion had injected into it.

"This, young man, is only vanity," said the count after having waited in vain for Oscar's excuses. "One who is proud, humbles himself, for there is greatness in certain humiliations. I am very much afraid that you will never make anything of this boy."

And the Minister of State passed on. Moreau took hold of Oscar again and led him back to his house. While the horses were being yoked to the road-wagon he wrote the following letter to Madame Clapart:

"My Dear,

"Oscar has just ruined me. During his journey in the Pierrotin coach, this morning, he spoke of the countess's levities to His Excellency himself, who was traveling *incognito*, and told the count himself his secrets regarding his terrible malady that he contracted through his spending so many nights at work in his various offices. After having deposed me, the count instructed me not to let Oscar sleep at Presles, but to send him away. And so, in obedience to him, I am at this moment having my horses yoked to my wife's road-wagon, and Brochon, my stable-boy, is going to bring this little wretch back to you. You may imagine in what a state of desolation my wife and I are, and I will not describe it to you. In a few days I will go and see you, for I must do something. I have three children, I must think of the future, and I know not yet what to decide, for my intention is to show the count what seventeen years are worth in the life of a man like me. Worth two hundred and sixty thousand francs, I mean to attain a fortune that will enable me to be some day almost His Excellency's equal. At this moment I feel myself capable of moving mountains, of overcoming insurmountable difficulties. What a lever a scene of such humiliation is! What blood, then, has Oscar in his veins? I cannot compliment you on him, his conduct is that of a noodle. Just as I am writing to you he has not yet been able to utter a word, nor to answer any of my wife's questions or mine—is he about to become an imbecile or is he one already? My friend, you did not then teach him his lesson before sending him out? How much misfortune you would have spared me by accompanying him, as I had asked you!

If Estelle frightened you, you could have remained at Moisselles. In fine, all is said. Adieu, we shall meet shortly.

"Your devoted servant and friend,

"MOREAU."

At eight o'clock in the evening Madame Clapart on returning from a short walk with her husband, was knitting winter stockings for Oscar by the light of a single candle. Monsieur Clapart was waiting for one of his friends, named Poiret, who sometimes came to play dominoes with him, for never did he take the chance of spending the evening in a café. In spite of the prudence imposed on him by the moderateness of his income, Clapart could not answer for his temperance amid the articles of consumption and in company with the regular customers, whose raillery would have stirred him up.

"I'm afraid Poiret is not coming," said Clapart to his wife.

"But, my friend, the portress would have told us so," Madame Clapart replied.

"She may have forgotten it!"

"Why do you think she forgets it?"

"It wouldn't be the first time she had forgotten something for us; for God knows how they treat folks that are without an equipage!"

"At last," said the poor woman so as to change the conversation and try to escape Clapart's thrusts, "Oscar is now at Presles; he will be very happy on that fine estate, in that fine park—"

"Yes, expect fine things of him," Clapart replied; "he will wrangle there."

"Will you not stop wishing so ill of that poor youth? what has he done to you? Well! my God, if some day we are in comfortable circumstances, perhaps we will owe it to him, for he is good-hearted—"

"By the time that chap succeeds in the world, our bones will long have been reduced to gelatine," Clapart exclaimed. "He will have changed very much, then! But you do not know him, being your own child: he is a boaster, a liar, an idler, an imbecile—"

"Suppose you were going on that way in Monsieur Poiret's hearing?" the poor mother said, stabbed to the heart by this diatribe that she had invited.

"A boy who never won a prize in his class!" Clapart exclaimed.

In the estimation of those of the middle-class, to carry off prizes in class is the certainty of a fine future for a boy.

"Did you get any?" his wife said to him. "And Oscar secured the fourth place in philosophy."

This apostrophe imposed silence for a moment on Clapart.

"And on that account Madame Moreau ought to love him like a nail, you know where! She will try to make her husband find fault with him—Oscar become manager of Presles?—He must know land-surveying, get acquainted with husbandry—"

"He will learn."

"He? the caterwauler! Let us guess, if he were in a position, a week would not pass before he would commit some stupidity that would get him dismissed by the Comte de Sérizy?"

"My God, how can you be so bitter against the future of a poor youth full of good qualities, as sweet as an angel, and incapable of doing evil to anyone whomsoever?"

At that moment, the cracks of a postilion's whip, the noise of a road-wagon at full trot, the prancing of two horses that stopped at the gate of the house, had set the Rue de la Cerisaie in commotion. Clapart, who heard all the windows opening, went out on the square.

"They are bringing Oscar back to you post haste!" he exclaimed in a tone in which his satisfaction was concealed under real anxiety.

"Oh! my God, what has happened to him?" said the poor mother, who was seized with a trembling that shook her as a leaf is shaken by the autumn wind.

Brochon went up, followed by Oscar and Poiret.

"My God! what has happened?" the mother repeated, addressing the stable-boy.

"I do not know, but Monsieur Moreau is no longer manager of Presles; they say it is your son who is the cause of it, and His Lordship has ordered that he be sent back to you. Moreover, here's that poor Monsieur Moreau's letter to you, and he is so changed, madame, as to make one pity him."

"Clapart, two glasses of wine for the postilion and for the gentleman," said the mother, who went and threw herself into an armchair, where she read the fatal letter. "Oscar," she said, as she drew him towards her bed, "you want to kill your mother, then?—After all that I said this morning!"

Madame Clapart did not finish her sentence, she fainted from grief, Oscar remained stupefied, standing. Madame Clapart regained consciousness on hearing her husband say to Oscar as he shook him by the arm:

"Will you answer?"

"Go and get ready for bed, sir," she said to her son. "And let him alone, Monsieur Clapart, and do not drive him crazy, for he is so changed as to excite alarm."

Oscar did not hear his mother's remark, he went to bed as soon as he received orders to do so.

All who recall their later youth, will not be astonished to learn that after a day so full of emotions and events Oscar slept the sleep of the just, despite the enormity of his faults. Next day he did not find nature so changed as he expected, and he was astonished at being hungry, he who regarded himself the evening before as unworthy to live. He had suffered only morally. At that age, the moral impressions succeed one another too rapidly for one to be weakened by another, no matter how deeply graven the first may be. And so, the system of corporal punishments, though philanthropists have

vigorously attacked them in these later times, is necessary for children in certain cases; and, moreover, it is the most natural, for nature does not proceed otherwise, she makes use of pain to make upon us a durable impression of her teachings. If, to the unfortunately passing shame that had seized upon Oscar the day before, the manager had added an afflictive punishment, perhaps the lesson would have been complete. The discernment with which corrections ought to be used is the strongest argument against them; for nature is never deceived, while the preceptor must often err.

Madame Clapart had been careful to send her husband out, so that she might be alone during the morning with her son. She was in a pitiful state. Her eyes softened by tears, her expression fatigued by a sleepless night, her weakened voice, everything about her asked pardon by showing an excessive sorrow that she could not have borne a second time. On seeing Oscar enter, she made a sign to him to sit alongside of her, and reminded him in a mild but penetrating tone of the favors received from the manager of Presles. She told Oscar that, for six years especially, she was living on Moreau's ingenious charities. Monsieur Clapart's place, due to the Comte de Sérizy, as well as the half-scholarship, by the aid of which Oscar had finished his education, would cease sooner or later. Clapart could not pretend to a pension, not counting a sufficient number of years in the Treasury or in the City to obtain one from it. As soon as Monsieur

Clapart would lose his place, what would become of them all?

"As for me," she said, "should I have to take to nursing the sick or becoming manager in a big house, I would be able to earn my bread and support Monsieur Clapart. But as for you," she said to Oscar, "what will you do? You have no fortune, and you must make your own, for it is necessary to be able to live. There are only four great careers for you young people—trade, government, the privileged professions and the military service. Any branch of trade requires capital, and we have none to give you. For want of capital, a young man brings his devotedness, his capacity; but trade means great discretion, and your conduct of yesterday does not give me any hope that you would succeed in it. To enter a public department one must serve for a long time as a supernumerary there, have backing in it, and you have alienated the only protector that we had, and the most powerful of all. Moreover, suppose that you were endowed with the most extraordinary means by the aid of which a young man gets there at once, either in trade or in a government office, where would you get the money to feed and clothe yourself during the time that one spends in learning his duties?"

Here the mother, like all women, gave herself up to verbose lamentations: how was she to get along, deprived of the assistance in kind that the management of Presles enabled Moreau to send her? Oscar had destroyed her protector's fortune. After trade

and the government, careers of which her son must not dream, because of inability on her part to support him, came the privileged professions of the notaryship, the bar, attorneys and constables. But he would have to take his course in law, study for three years, and pay considerable sums for entrance fees, examinations, theses and diplomas; the large number of aspirants compelled one to distinguish one's self by superior talent; in fine, the question of Oscar's support was ever uppermost in her mind.

"Oscar," she said in closing, "I had centred all my pride and all my life in you. In accepting an unhappy old age, I set my eyes on you, I saw you embracing a fine career and succeeding in it. This hope gave me courage to bear up against the privations that I have suffered for six years past to keep you at college, where you still cost us seven or eight hundred francs a year, in spite of the half-scholarship. Now that my hope has vanished, your fate frightens me! I cannot dispose of a sou out of Monsieur Clapart's salary for my son or for myself. What are you going to do? You are not strong enough in mathematics to enter the special schools, and, moreover, where would I get the three thousand francs for board that they require? There is life as it is, my boy! You are eighteen years old and you are strong, enlist as a soldier, that will be the only way of earning your bread—"

Oscar as yet knew nothing of life. Like all children from whom care has been taken to conceal

the poverty of the home, he was ignorant of the necessity of making his fortune; the word *trade* conveyed no idea to him, and the word *government* did not tell him much, for he did not perceive its results; he listened, then, with a dutiful mien, which he tried to make submissive, to his mother's remonstrances, but they were lost in vacuum. Nevertheless, the idea of being a soldier and the tears that rolled from his mother's eyes made that boy weep. As soon as Madame Clapart saw Oscar's cheeks furrowed with tears, her strength failed her; and, like all mothers in such cases, she had recourse to the peroration that ends crises of this sort, in which they suffer, at the same time, their own sorrows and those of their children.

"Come, Oscar, *promise me* that you will be discreet in future, never again to speak wrongfully or disparagingly, to repress your foolish pride," etc., etc.

Oscar promised all that his mother asked him to promise, and, after having drawn him gently to her, Madame Clapart ended by embracing him so as to console him for having been scolded.

"Now," she said, "you will listen to your mother, you will follow her advice, for a mother can give only good advice to her son. We will go to your uncle Cardot's. There lies our last hope. Cardot owed much to your father, who, by giving him his sister, Mademoiselle Husson, with a dowry that was enormous for that time, enabled him to make a great fortune in the silk trade. I think he

will get you a place with Monsieur Camusot, his successor and son-in-law, in the Rue des Bourdonnais—But, you see, your uncle Cardot has four children. He gave his establishment of the *Cocon d'Or* to his eldest daughter, Madame Camusot. If Camusot has millions, he also has four children, by two different wives, and he scarcely knows of our existence. Cardot married Marianne, his second daughter, to Monsieur Protez, of the firm of Protez and Chiffreville. The office of his eldest son, the notary, cost four hundred thousand francs, and he has just got Joseph Cardot, his second son, as a partner into the Matifat drug house. Your uncle Cardot will have many reasons, then, not to be concerned about you, whom he sees four times a year. He has never come to pay a visit here; while he knew well, indeed did he, how to come to see me at Madame Mère's, to get the furniture of their Imperial Highnesses, of the Emperor and the great ones of his court. Now the Camusots go to extremes! Camusot married his son by his first wife to the daughter of an usher of the king's cabinet! Society is well humped when it stoops! In fine, it is shrewd, for the *Cocon d'Or* has the custom of the court under the Bourbons as under the Emperor. To-morrow, then, we will go to your uncle Cardot's, and I hope you will know how to behave yourself as you ought; for there, I repeat, is our last hope."

*

Monsieur Jean-Jérôme-Séverin Cardot had six years before lost his wife, Mademoiselle Husson, to whom the purveyor, in the time of his splendor, had given a hundred thousand francs dowry in cash. Cardot, the chief clerk of the *Cocon d'Or*, one of the oldest houses in Paris, had bought this establishment in 1793, at the time when its patrons were ruined by the *maximum;* and the money of Mademoiselle Husson's dowry had enabled him to make an almost colossal fortune in ten years. To settle his children wealthily, he had entertained the ingenious idea of investing a sum of three hundred thousand francs for life in his wife's name and his own, which gave him an annual income of thirty thousand francs. As regards his capital, he had divided it into three dowries of four hundred thousand francs each for his children. The *Cocon d'Or,* the dowry of his eldest daugher, was accepted for this sum by Camusot. The good man, almost a septuagenarian, was able, then, to spend, and did spend his thirty thousand francs a year, without infringing on the interests of his children, all very advantageously settled, and whose testimonies of affection were not then stained by any thought of cupidity. Uncle Cardot dwelt at Belleville in one of the finest houses situated above La Courtille. He occupied there, on a second floor, that commanded a full view of the

valley of the Seine, a suite of rooms for a thousand francs, with a southern exposure, and with the exclusive enjoyment of a large garden; and so he was scarcely bothered by the three or four other tenants lodged in that vast country house. Assured, by a long lease, of ending his days there, he lived rather meanly, served by his old cook and by the former chambermaid to the late Madame Cardot, who expected to receive each some six hundred francs a year after his death, and who, consequently, did not steal from him. These two women took unheard-of care of their master and interested themselves so much the more as no one was less fractious and less finical than he. The rooms, furnished by the late Madame Cardot, remained in the same condition for six years past, the old man was satisfied with them; he did not spend altogether a thousand crowns a year, for he dined in Paris five times a week, and returned every evening at midnight in a hired hack belonging to an establishment situated at the Courtille barrier. The cook had scarcely to concern herself but with breakfast. The good man breakfasted at eleven o'clock, then he dressed, perfumed himself and went to Paris. Ordinarily middle-class folk give notice when they dine in town; but as for old Cardot, he gave notice when he dined at home. This little old man, fat, fresh, thickset and strong, was, as the people say, always as neat as a new pin, that is, always in black silk stockings, paduasoy breeches, white piqué waistcoat, shining linen, blue-bottle

coat, violet silk gloves, gold buckles on his slippers and breeches, finally, a dust of powder on his hair, a small tuft of which was fastened with a black ribbon. His countenance was remarkable for eyebrows as bushy as shrubs under which glanced gray eyes, and for a square, thick and long nose that gave him the appearance of an old prebendary. This physiognomy kept its word. Old Cardot belonged, indeed, to that race of wanton Gérontes that is disappearing day by day and that supplied the place of the Turcarets to the romances and comedies of the eighteenth century. Uncle Cardot said: *Beautiful lady!* He brought home in a carriage the women that were without escort; he put himself at their disposal, according to his expression, with chivalrous airs. Under his calm mien, under his snow-white brow, he concealed an old age concerned only with pleasures. Among men he boldly professed Epicurism and indulged in off-color jokes that were somewhat strong. He had not found it amiss that his son-in-law Camusot paid court to the charming actress Coralie, for he himself was secretly a Mecænas to Mademoiselle Florentine, first dancer at the Gaîté theatre. But of this life and of these opinions there was nothing apparent in him or in his public conduct. Uncle Cardot, grave and polite, passed for being almost cold, so much decorum did he assume, and a devotee would have called him a hypocrite. This worthy gentleman particularly hated priests, he formed a part of that large troop of simpletons who were subscribers to

the *Constitutionnel*, and was very much concerned with the *refusals of burial*. He adored Voltaire, though his preferences were Piro, Vadé, and Collé. Naturally he admired Béranger, whom he ingeniously called *the High Priest of the religion of Lisette*. His daughters, Madame Camusot and Madame Protez, and his two sons, would, according to a popular expression, have sunk into the earth if anyone had explained to them what their father meant by "singing *La Mère Godichon!*" This wise old man had not spoken of his life income to his children, who, seeing him live so meanly, all believed that he had deprived himself of his fortune on their account, and redoubled their care and tenderness. And so, occasionally, he said to his son: "Do not lose your fortune, for I have none to leave you." Camusot, in whom he found much of his own character and whom he loved well enough to let him know of his shrewd ways, was the only one in the secret of his annuity of thirty thousand francs. Camusot strongly approved of the good man's philosophy, who, according to him, after having provided for the happiness of his children and so nobly performed his duties, might well end his life joyously.

"Do you see, my friend," the former head of the *Cocon d'Or* said to him, "I could get married again, could I not? A young wife would have given me children—Yes, I should have had some, i was at the age when one still has them—Well, Florentine does not cost me so much as a wife, she does not tire me,

she will give me no children, and will never eat up your fortune."

Camusot declared that old Cardot had the most exquisite appreciation of family life; he regarded him as an accomplished father-in-law.

"He knows how," said he, "to conciliate the interests of his children with the pleasures that it is quite natural to enjoy in old age, after having experienced all the bustle of trade."

Neither the Cardots, the Camusots, nor the Protezes suspected the manner in which their old aunt, Madame Clapart lived. The family relations were confined to the sending of notes of information in case of death or marriage and cards on New Year's day. The proud Madame Clapart allowed her feelings to yield only to the interest of her Oscar, and to her friendship for Moreau, the only person who had remained faithful to her in misfortune. She had not tired old Cardot by her presence nor by her importunities; but she had attached herself to him as to a hope, she went to see him once every three months, she spoke to him of Oscar Husson, the nephew of the late respected Madame Cardot, and brought her son to him three times during vacations. On each visit the good man had made Oscar dine at the *Cadran Bleu*, had taken him in the evening to the Gaîté, and had brought him back to the Rue de la Cerisaie. Once, after having furnished him with an entire new outfit, he had given him the silver drinking-cup and covers required by the college rules. Oscar's mother tried to prove to the good

man that he was beloved by his nephew, she always spoke to him of that drinking-cup, of those covers and of that charming suit of which nothing now remained but the waistcoat. But these little hints hurt Oscar more than they served him with an old fox as sly as was Uncle Cardot. Old Cardot had never been much in love with his deceased wife, a large woman, dry and ruddy; he knew, moreover, the circumstances of the late Husson's marriage with Oscar's mother; and, without disesteeming her in the least, he was not unaware that Oscar was posthumous; thus to him his poor nephew seemed a perfect stranger to the Cardots. By not foreseeing misfortune, Oscar's mother had not remedied these defects of attachment between Oscar and his uncle, by inspiring the merchant with friendship for his nephew from an early age. Like all women who concentrate themselves in the feeling of maternity, Madame Clapart hardly put herself in Uncle Cardot's place, she believed he ought to take the keenest possible interest in so sweet a child, who bore, in fine, the late Madame Cardot's name.

"Sir, it is your nephew Oscar's mother," said the chambermaid to Monsieur Cardot as he was walking in his garden waiting for breakfast, after having been shaved and powdered by his hairdresser.

"Good-day," pretty lady," said the former silk merchant as he saluted Madame Clapart, enveloped in his white piqué dressing-gown. "Well, well! how your lively little fellow grows," he added, as he took hold of one of Oscar's ears.

"He has finished his classes, and he has regretted very much that his dear uncle was not present at the Henri IV. distribution of premiums, for he was mentioned. The name Husson, which he will bear worthily, let us hope, was proclaimed—"

"The devil! the devil!" remarked the little old man, stopping. Madame Clapart, Oscar and he were walking on a terrace in front of the orange, myrtle and pomegranate trees. "And what did he get?"

"Fourth honorable mention in philosophy," the mother gloriously replied.

"Oh! the chap has a good way to go to make up for lost time," Uncle Cardot exclaimed, "for to finish with an honorable mention—*that's no great thing!* You will breakfast with me?" he continued.

"We're at your orders," Madame Clapart replied. "Ah! my good Monsieur Cardot, what satisfaction for fathers and mothers when their children start well in life. In this respect, as in all others, forsooth," she said continuing, "you are one of the happiest fathers that I know—Under your honorable son-in-law and your amiable daughter the *Cocon d'Or* has remained the chief establishment in Paris. There is your eldest son for ten years past at the head of the finest notary's office in the capital and married rich. Your youngest has just become a partner in the richest of drug houses. In fine, you have charming granddaughters. You see yourself the head of four great families—Leave us, Oscar; go and look at the garden, but don't touch the flowers."

"But he is eighteen!" said Uncle Cardot, smiling at that recommendation which belittled Oscar.

"Alas! yes, my good Monsieur Cardot, and after having been able to bring him so far, neither hump-backed nor bandy-legged, sound in mind and body, after having sacrificed everything to give him an education, it would be very hard not to see him on the road to fortune."

"But that Monsieur Moreau, through whom you got his half-scholarship in the College Henri IV., will start him on a safe road," said Uncle Cardot, with hypocrisy concealed under a good-natured mien.

"Monsieur Moreau may die," she said, "and, moreover, he has quarreled without any possible chance of reconciliation with the Comte de Sérizy, his master."

"The devil! the devil!—Listen, madame, I see you coming—"

"No, sir," said Oscar's mother, straightway interrupting the old man, who out of respect for a *pretty lady* restrained the feeling of spleen that one experiences on being interrupted. "Alas! you know nothing of the anguish of a mother who, for seven years, has been forced to take for her son a sum of six hundred francs a year out of her husband's eighteen hundred francs salary—Yes, sir, that is our entire fortune. So, what can I do for my Oscar? Monsieur Clapart so hates this poor boy that it is impossible for me to keep him at home. A poor woman, alone in the world, must she not in

such circumstances come and consult the only relative that her son has under heaven!"

You were right," goodman Cardot replied. "You had never told me anything of all that—"

"Ah! sir," proudly continued Madame Clapart, "you are the last to whom I would confide the extent of my poverty. It is all my fault, I took a husband whose incapacity exceeds all belief. Oh! I am very unfortunate—"

"Listen, madame," the little old man continued gravely, "do not weep. To see a pretty lady weep gives me a frightful pain—After all, your son's name is Husson, and, if my dear departed were alive, she would do something for the name of her father and her brother—"

"She loved her brother very much," Oscar's mother exclaimed.

"But my entire fortune has been given to my children, who no longer have anything to expect of me," said the old man, continuing: "I have divided among them the two millions that I had, for I wanted to see them happy and with all their fortune during my lifetime. I have kept to myself only an annual income for life, and, at my age, one sticks to his habits—Do you know on what road we should start that chap?" he said as he called Oscar back and took him by the arm. "Make him study law, I will pay the fees and the thesis expenses. Put him in a proctor's office, where he will learn pettifogging; if he gets along well, if he distinguishes himself, if he likes the profession,

and I am still alive, each of my children will loan him the quarter part of the price to purchase a practice in due course; as for me, I will become his security. You have accordingly, from now until then, only to feed and clothe him; he will have to go on short rations, but he will learn life. Well, well! as for me, I set out from Lyons with two double louis that were given to me by my grandmother, I came on foot to Paris, and see me now. Fasting aids health. Young man, discretion, probity, work, and one gets there! One derives much pleasure from making his fortune; and, as long as one has teeth, one eats at his fancy in his old age, singing, like me, from time to time, *La Mère Godichon!* Remember my words: probity, work and discretion."

"Do you hear, Oscar?" said the mother. "Your uncle sums up in three words all that I have been telling you, and you ought to engrave the last one in your memory in letters of fire—"

"Oh! it is there," Oscar replied.

"Well, then, thank your uncle; do you not hear that he takes charge of your future? You may become a Paris attorney."

"He does not know the grandeur of his destiny," the little old man replied on seeing Oscar's stupid mien, "he is leaving college. Listen, I am not a babbler," the uncle continued. "Remember that, at your age, probity becomes an established fact only by knowing how to resist temptations, and, in a large city like Paris, they are to be found at

every step. Continue to live with your mother, in a mansard; go direct to your school; thence return to your office, keep digging at your work evening and morning, study at home; become a second clerk at twenty-two, at twenty-four a first; be learned, and your game is bagged. Well, if that life displeases you, you might enter the office of my son the notary, and become his successor—Thus, work, patience, discretion, probity, there are your landmarks."

"And God grant that you live thirty years more, so as to see your fifth son realizing all that we expect of him!" Madame Clapart exclaimed as she took hold of Uncle Cardot's hand and pressed it with an emotion worthy of her youth.

"Let us go to breakfast," the good little old man replied as he led Oscar by one ear.

During breakfast Uncle Cardot watched his nephew without seeming to do so, and remarked that he knew nothing of life.

"Send him to me from time to time," he said to Madame Clapart as he dismissed her and pointed to Oscar, "I will shape him for you."

This visit calmed the sorrows of the poor woman, who had not hoped for such brilliant success. During a fortnight she went out to walk with Oscar, watched over him almost tyrannically, and thus reached the end of the month of October. One morning Oscar saw the dreaded manager coming, who took by surprise the poor household of the Rue de la Cerisaie at breakfast, which consisted of a

herring salad and lettuce, with a cup of milk for dessert.

"We have settled in Paris, and we do not live in it as at Presles," said Moreau, who thus wanted to announce to Madame Clapart the change brought into their relations through Oscar's fault; "but I will be there very little. I have formed a partnership with old Léger and old Margueron of Beaumont. We are real estate brokers, and we have begun by buying the Persan estate. I am the head of this company, which has a capital of a million, for I borrowed on my property. When I find a matter of business, old Léger and I examine it, my partners have a fourth each, I have half of the profits, for I go to all the trouble; and so I will be always on the road. My wife lives in Paris, in the Faubourg du Roule, quite modestly. When we shall have realized on some transactions, and we will risk no more than the profits, if we are satisfied with Oscar, perhaps we will employ him."

"Come, my friend, the catastrophe due to my unfortunate boy's levity will no doubt be the source of a brilliant fortune to you; for, in truth, you were burying your resources and your energy at Presles—"

Then Madame Clapart told of her visit to Uncle Cardot so as to show Moreau that she and her son might no longer be a burden to him.

"He is right, is that good old man," replied the ex-manager, "Oscar must be kept in that path with an iron hand, and he will certainly be a notary

or an attorney. But let him not deviate from the path marked out. Ah! I can help you. A real estate dealer's practice is important, and I have been told of an attorney who has just purchased an empty title, that is, an office without clients. He is a young man as hard as a bar of iron, eager for work, a horse of ferocious activity; his name is Desroches; I am going to offer him all my business on condition that he will break in Oscar; I will propose to him to take him at his house for a consideration of nine hundred francs, I will give three hundred, and thus your son will cost you only six hundred francs, and I am indeed going to recommend him to the prior. If the boy wants to become a man, it will be under this rod; for he will leave there a notary, a barrister, or an attorney."

"Come, Oscar, thank this good Monsieur Moreau, then, you are there as if for good! All young men who do stupid things have not the good luck to meet friends who still interest themselves in them after having been afflicted through them—"

"The best way of making your peace with me," said Moreau as he shook Oscar's hand, "is to work with constant application and to conduct yourself properly."

Ten days later, Oscar was presented by the ex-manager to Master Desroches, attorney, who had recently opened an office in the Rue de Béthisy, in spacious apartments at the end of a narrow court, and at a relatively moderate figure. Desroches, a young man of twenty-six, brought up strictly by a

father of extreme severity, born of poor parents, had seen himself in the conditions in which Oscar was placed; he interested himself in him accordingly, but as he might interest himself in anyone, with the appearances of severity that characterized him. The sight of this dry and spare young man, of muddy complexion, with cropped hair, brusque of speech, with penetrating eye and sombre vivacity, terrified poor Oscar.

"Here one works day and night," said the attorney from the depths of his armchair and from behind a long table on which papers were piled up like the Alps. "Monsieur Moreau, we will not kill him for you, but he must keep up with our pace—Monsieur Godeschal!" he called.

Though it was a Sunday, the chief clerk appeared, pen in hand.

"Monsieur Godeschal, this is the parliamentary lawyer's apprentice of whom I have spoken to you, and in whom Monsieur Moreau takes the keenest interest; he will dine with us and will take the small mansard alongside your room; you will measure for him the time necessary to go from here to the Law School and return, so that he will not have five minutes to lose; you will see that he learns the Code and becomes strong in his courses, that is, that when he will have finished his study work you will give him authors to read; in fine, he is to be under your immediate direction, and I will have an eye over him. They want to make of him what you have made of yourself, a competent first clerk,

for the day when he will take his oath as a barrister. Go with Godeschal, my little friend, he will show you your bunk and you will make yourself at home in it.—You see Godeschal?—" Desroches continued, addressing Moreau. "He is a fellow who, like me, has nothing; he is the brother of Mariette, the famous dancer, who is saving up for him enough to get an office of his own in ten years. All my clerks are jolly fellows who must count only on their ten fingers to win their fortune. And so my five clerks and I do as much work as twelve others! In ten years I will have the finest practice in Paris. Here one is most eager for business and clients, and that is beginning to show. I have taken Godeschal from my brother lawyer Derville, he was only second clerk until a fortnight ago; but we have come to know each other in this great office. With me Godeschal has a thousand francs, board and lodging. He is a young man who is worthy of me, he is indefatigable! I love him, I do, that youth! He has known how to live on six hundred francs, like me when I was a clerk. What I want especially is untarnished probity; and when one practises it thus in indigence, one is a man. On the slightest transgression in that direction, a clerk leaves my office."

"I see the boy is at a good school," said Moreau.

For two whole years Oscar lived in the Rue de Béthisy, in the cave of pettifogging; for if ever this superannuated expression could be applied to an office, it was to that of Desroches. Under this

surveillance, at the same time fastidious and adroit, he was kept to his hours and his work so strictly that his life in the heart of Paris resembled that of a monk.

At five o'clock in the morning, in all seasons, Godeschal awoke. He went down with Oscar to the office so as to save fire in winter, and they always found the master up and at work. Oscar attended to the office messages and prepared his lessons for the School; but he prepared them on enormous proportions. Godeschal, and often the master, indicated to their pupil the authors to be mastered and the difficulties to be overcome. Oscar abandoned a title of the Code only after having fathomed it and having in turn satisfied his master and Godeschal, who subjected him to preparatory examinations more serious and longer than those of the Law School. On returning from the course, where he remained but a little while, he took his place again in the office, he resumed work there, he went sometimes to the Palais, he was at last under the devotedness of the terrible Godeschal until dinner. The dinner, that of the master too, consisted of a big dish of meat, a dish of vegetables and a salad. The dessert was made up of a piece of Gruyère cheese. After dinner Godeschal and Oscar returned to the office and worked there until evening. Once a month Oscar went to breakfast at his Uncle Cardot's, and he spent the Sundays with his mother. From time to time Moreau, when he came to the office about his business, took Oscar

to dine at the Palais-Royal and regaled him by taking him to see some performance. Oscar had been so brow-beaten by Godeschal and Desroches about his fancies for elegance that he no longer thought of toilet.

"A good clerk," Godeschal said to him, "ought to have two black coats—a new one and an old one, —black trousers, black stockings and shoes. Boots cost too much. One has boots when one is an attorney. A clerk ought not to spend altogether over seven hundred francs. One wears good coarse shirts of strong linen. Ah! when one starts from zero to make a fortune, one must know how to reduce one's self to what is necessary. See Monsieur Desroches! He has done what we are doing, and see how he has got there."

Godeschal preached by example. If he professed the strictest principles of honor, discretion, probity, he unostentatiously practised them, as he breathed, as he walked. It was the natural play of his soul, as walking and breathing are the play of the organs. Eighteen months after Oscar's installation, the second clerk had for the second time a slight error in the account of his petty cash. Godeschal said to him in the hearing of the whole office:

"My dear Gaudet, get away from here of your own accord so that no one can say the master dismissed you. You are either distracted or inaccurate and the slightest of these mistakes is worth nothing here. The master will know nothing of it and that's all I can do for a comrade."

At twenty Oscar saw himself third clerk in Master Desroches' office. If he had earned nothing as yet, he was fed and lodged, for he did the work of a second clerk. Desroches employed two master clerks, and the second clerk gave way under his heavy labors. On reaching the end of his second year at law, Oscar, already better equipped than many graduates, attended to the Palais affairs intelligently and pleaded some referred cases. In fine, Godeschal and Desroches were satisfied with him. Only, though he had become almost reasonable, he showed a propensity to pleasure and a desire to shine that was kept in restraint by the severe discipline and the unceasing work of that life. The real estate broker, satisfied with the clerk's progress, relaxed his severity. When, in July, 1825, Oscar passed his final examination with white balls, Moreau gave him the wherewith to clothe himself elegantly. Madame Clapart, happy and proud of her son, prepared a superb outfit for the future graduate, for the future second clerk. In poor families, presents always have the opportuneness of a something useful. On returning, in November, Oscar Husson had the room of the second clerk, whom he at last replaced, he had eight hundred francs salary, board and lodging. And so Uncle Cardot, who came secretly to seek information about this nephew of Monsieur Desroches, promised Madame Clapart to put Oscar in a condition to negotiate about an office, if he continued thus.

In spite of such appearances of wisdom, Oscar

Husson had some stiff fights within himself. He wanted, at certain moments, to give up a life so directly contrary to his tastes and to his character. He thought convicts must be happier than he. As the collar of this iron rule was killing him, the desire seized him to fly as he compared himself in the streets to some well-dressed young men. Frequently carried by impulses of folly towards women, he was resigned, but only by falling into a profound disgust for life. Supported by Godeschal's example, he was rather dragged than moved voluntarily to remain in so rough a path. Godeschal, who was watching Oscar, regarded it as a principle not to expose his pupil to temptations. Most frequently the clerk was penniless, or had so little money that he could not give himself up to any excess. In this last year the good Godeschal had joined five or six pleasure parties with Oscar and paid his way, for he felt that it was necessary to slacken the cord by which this tethered young buck was bound. These breaks, as the strait-laced chief clerk called them, helped Oscar to bear with life; for he had little amusement at his uncle Cardot's, and still less at his mother's, who lived even more parsimoniously than Desroches. Moreau could not, like Godeschal, become familiar with Oscar, and perhaps this severe protector of young Husson made use of Godeschal to initiate the poor youth into the mysteries of life. Oscar, having become discreet, had at last come to understand, by contact with business, the extent of the blunder he had committed during his fatal

journey in the cuckoo; but, though his fancies were for the most part repressed, the folly of youth might still draw him on. Nevertheless, in proportion as he came to know the world and its laws, his reason was formed, and, provided that Godeschal did not lose sight of him, Moreau flattered himself that he would bring Madame Clapart's son to something good.

"How is he getting along?" the real estate broker asked on returning from a journey that had kept him away from Paris for several months.

"Always too much vanity," Godeschal replied. "You give him fine clothes and fine linen, he puts on the airs of an exchange broker, and my dandy goes on Sundays to the Tuileries to look for adventures. What do you want! he is young. He bothers me to introduce him to my sister, at whose house he would see famous company: actresses, dancing girls, fops, people who dissipate their means.—He has not the turn of mind to make an attorney, I am afraid. He talks rather well, however, he might be a barrister, he would plead cases well prepared."

In November, 1825, just when Oscar took possession of his post and when he was preparing to maintain his thesis for admission, there came to Desroches' a new fourth clerk to fill the vacancy caused by Oscar's promotion.

This fourth clerk, whose name was Frédéric Marest, was intended for the magistracy, and was finishing his third year in law. He was, according

to the information obtained by the office police, a handsome youth of twenty-three, worth an income of twelve thousand francs by the death of a bachelor uncle, and the son of a Madame Marest, the widow of a rich lumber dealer. The future substitute, animated by the laudable desire of knowing his calling in its most minute details, entered Desroches' with the intention of studying procedure and being capable of filling the place of chief clerk in two years. He counted on practising as a barrister at Paris, so as to be fit to exercise the duties of the office that would not be refused to a rich young man. To see himself at thirty a king's proctor in some tribunal or other was his whole ambition. Though this Frédéric was the cousin-german of Georges Marest, as the mystifier of the journey to Presles had told his name only to Moreau, young Husson knew him only by the Christian name Georges, and this name of Frédéric Marest could recall nothing to him.

"Gentlemen," said Godeschal at breakfast, addressing all the clerks, "I announce to you the arrival of a new pupil; and, as he is very rich, we shall accord him, I hope, a famous welcome—"

"Bring out the book!" said Oscar as he looked at the little clerk, "and let us be serious."

The junior clerk clambered like a squirrel along the pigeon-holes to get a register placed on the last shelf only to receive layers of dust.

"It is getting black," said the junior clerk, as he pointed to a book.

Let us explain the everlasting pleasantry caused by that book then in use in most offices. *Breakfasts for clerks, dinners for revenue collectors and suppers for lords*—that old dictum of the eighteenth century is still true, so far as regards the limb of the law or anyone who has spent two or three years of his life at the study of procedure in an attorney's office, or of notaryship with any master whomsoever. In the life of clerks, where one works so much, one likes pleasure with so much the more ardor as it is rare; but especially does one enjoy a mystification with delight. This is what, up to a certain point, explains Georges Marest's conduct in the Pierrotin coach. The most sombre clerk is always tempted with an inclination to farce and jest. The instinct with which one takes hold of and develops a mystification and a pleasantry, among clerks, is marvelous to see, and has its analogy only among painters. The workshop and the office are, in this line, superior to comedians. By buying an empty title, Desroches to a certain extent began a new dynasty. This foundation interrupted the sequence of the usages relative to welcome. And so, having come into chambers where stamped papers had never been signed, Desroches had put new tables there, entirely new white and blue bordered cartons. His office was filled with clerks taken from different offices, having no bonds between them, and, so to say, astonished at their coming together. Godeschal, who had given his first service at Master Derville's, was not a clerk to let himself lose

the valuable tradition of welcome. Welcome is a breakfast that every neophyte owes to the elders of the office that he enters. Now, just when young Oscar came to the office, within six months after Desroches' installation, on a winter afternoon when business was despatched early, at the moment when the clerks were warming themselves before leaving, it occurred to Godeschal to get up a so-called *archi-triclino-basochian* register, of the remotest antiquity, saved from the storms of the Revolution, that had come down from Bordin, *procureur* at the Châtelet who was the intermediate predecessor of Sauvagnest, the attorney from whom Desroches derived his practice. They began by searching in the shop of a dealer in old paper for some paper register bearing the marks of the eighteenth century, well and duly bound in parchment, in which a decree of the grand council might be read. After having found this book, they dragged it in the dust, in the frying-pan, in the fire-place, in the kitchen; they left it even in what the clerks call *the chamber of consultation,* and they obtained a mouldiness that would delight antiquaries, cracks betokening a barbarous antiquity, corners so worn as to suggest that rats had regaled themselves on it. The edges were reddened with astonishing perfection. Once the book was put in this state, it contained citations such as these, that will tell the most obtuse of the usage to which Desroches' office put this collection, the first sixty pages of which were filled with spurious reports. On the first leaf one read:

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. On this day, the feast of our Ladye Sainte-Geneviesve, patroness of Paris, under whose invocation are placed, since the year 1525, the clerks of this Office, we, the undersigned, clerks and junior clerks in the Office of Master Jerosme-Sebastien Bordin, successor to the late Guerbet, in his time proctor at Le Chastelet, have recognized the necessity incumbent on us of replacing the register and the archives of installations of the clerks of this glorious Office, distinguished member of the kingdom of Basoche, the which register was seen to be full in consequence of the acts of our dear and well-beloved predecessors, and have requested the Keeper of the Archives of the Palays to add it to those of the other Offices, and have all gone to mass in the parish church of Saint-Severin, to solemnize the inauguration of our new register.

"In witness whereof we have attached our signatures: Malin, chief clerke; Grevin, second clerke; Athanase Feret, clerke; Jacques Huet, clerke; Regnauld de Saint-Jean-d'Angely, clerke; Bedeau, junior clerke, puddle-jumper. In the year of our Lord, 1787.

"After having heard mass, we betook ourselves to La Courtille, and, at our common expense, had a big breakfast that ended only at seven o'clock in the morning."

It was wonderfully written. An expert would have sworn that this writing belonged to the eighteenth century. Twenty-seven reports of receptions followed, and the last referred to the fatal year 1792. After a gap of fourteen years the register began again, in 1806, with the appointment of Bordin as attorney to the committing tribunal of the Seine. And here is the rubric that marked the restoration of the kingdom of Basoche and other incidents:

"God, in His clemency, has deigned that in spite of the frightful storms which have raged over the land of France, that has become a great empire, the precious archives of the most famous office of Master Bordin have been preserved; and we, the undersigned, clerks of the most-worthy, most-virtuous Master Bordin, do not hesitate to attribute this unheard-of preservation, when so many titles, charters and privileges were lost, to the protection of Saint Geneviève, patroness of this office, and also to the respect that the last of the proctors of the old school had for all that pertained to the ancient usages and customs. In the uncertainty of determining what part Saint Geneviève and what Master Bordin had in this miracle, we have resolved to betake ourselves to Saint-Étienne-du-Mont, there to hear a mass that will be said at this shepherd-saint's altar, who sends us so many sheep to shear, and to invite our master to breakfast, hoping that he will foot the bill for it.

"Signed by: Oignard, chief clerk; Poidevin, second clerk; Proust, clerk; Brignolet, clerk; Derville, clerk; Augustin Coret, junior clerk.

"The Office, November 10, 1806."

"At three o'clock p. m. next day, the undersigned clerks here record their gratitude to their excellent master, who regaled them at the house of the Sieur Rolland, restaurant keeper, in the Rue du Hasard, with exquisite wines of three districts, Bordeaux, Champagne and Burgundy, with dishes particularly well prepared, from four o'clock in the afternoon until half-past seven. There were coffee, ices, and liqueurs in abundance. But the master's presence did not allow of the singing of lauds in clerical songs. No clerk exceeded the bounds of amiable gaiety, for the worthy, respectable and generous master had promised to bring his clerks to see Talma, in *Britannicus*, at the Théâtre Français. Long life to Master Bordin! May God shed His favors on our venerable chief! May he get a good price for so glorious an office! May the rich client come to him at his will! May his expense

bills be paid for him exactly to the farthing! May our future masters resemble him! May he be ever loved by the clerks, even when he shall be no more!"

Then follow thirty-three reports of receptions of clerks, which were distinguished by diverse handwritings and inks, phrases, signatures and praises of good cheer and wines which seemed to prove that the report was drawn up and signed during the session, *inter pocula.*

Finally, under date of the month of June, 1822, the time that Desroches took the oath, this constitutional entry was found:

"I, the undersigned, François-Claude-Marie Godeschal, called upon by Master Desroches to perform the difficult duties of chief clerk in an office in which the practice was to be made, having learned from Master Derville, from whom I came, of the existence of the famous *architriclino-basochian* archives that are celebrated at the Palais, have begged our gracious master to ask them of his predecessor, for it was important to discover this document bearing date the year 1786, which is connected with other archives deposited in the Palais, the existence of which has been certified to us by Messieurs Terrasse and Duclos, Keepers of the Records, and by the aid of which we go back to the year 1525, in finding in the clerical manners and culinary characteristics, historical indications of the highest value.

"This request having been granted, the office has come into possession this day of these testimonies of the respect which our predecessors constantly paid to the *Goddess* Bottle and to good cheer.

"Consequently, for the edification of our successors and to connect the chain of times and of goblets, I have invited Messieurs Doublet, second clerk; Vassal, third clerk;

Hérisson and Grandemain, clerks, and Dumets, junior clerk, to breakfast next Sunday at the *Cheval Rouge*, on the Quai Saint-Bernard, where we will celebrate the conquest of this book which contains the charter of our guzzlings.

"This Sunday, June 27, were drunk twelve bottles of different wines found to be exquisite. There were remarked the two melons, the pâtés after the *jus Romanum*, a filet of beef, a cake with mushroomibus. Mademoiselle Mariette, the chief clerk's illustrious sister and leading star of the Royal Academy of Music and Dancing, having put at the disposal of the office, seats in the orchestra for the performance this evening, record is made of this generosity. Moreover, it is decreed that the clerks shall betake themselves in a body to this noble lady's house to thank her, and declare to her that on the occasion of her first lawsuit, if the devil should send her one, she shall pay only the costs; which is decreed.

"Godeschal was proclaimed the flower of Basoche and especially a good boy. May a man who treats so well be soon in treaty for a practice!"

There were wine stains, ink blots and flourishes that resembled fireworks. To give a clear understanding of the seal of truth which they knew how to impress on this register, it will suffice to copy the report of the pretended reception given to Oscar:

"This day, Monday, November 25, 1822, after a session held yesterday in the Rue de la Cerisaie, in the Arsenal quarter, at the house of Madame Clapart, mother of the Basochian aspirant, Oscar Husson, we, the undersigned, declare that the reception banquet surpassed our expectations. It consisted of black and red radishes, gherkins, anchovies, butter and olives for side-dishes; of a savory soup with rice, that showed maternal solicitude, for we recognized in it a delicious taste of poultry, and, as the candidate acknowledged, we learned that in effect the stewed giblets, finely

prepared by Madame Clapart, had been judiciously inserted in the home pot with a care that is taken only by housekeepers.

"*Item*, the stew surrounded by a sea of jelly, due to the said Oscar's mother.

"*Item*, an ox tongue and tomatoes that did not find us automatous.

"*Item*, a pigeon stew so tasty as to make one believe that the angels had watched over it.

"*Item*, a timbale of macaroni before pots of chocolate with cream.

"*Item*, a dessert made up of eleven delicate dishes, among which, in spite of the state of intoxication into which sixteen bottles of exquisitely chosen wines had thrown us, we remarked a peach stew of august and prune-like delicacy."

"The Roussillon wines and those of the vineyards of the Rhone completely put in the shade those of Champagne and Burgundy. A bottle of maraschino and one of kirsch, despite the exquisite coffee, completely plunged us into such bibulous ecstasy that one of us, Sieur Hérisson, found himself in the Bois de Boulogne while he still thought that he was in the Boulevard du Temple; and that Jacquinaut, the junior clerk, only fourteen years old, spoke to ladies of the age of fifty-seven, taking them for women of easy morals; report agreed to.

"There is in the statutes of our order a strictly observed law, that is to let aspirants to the privileges of the basoche regulate the splendors of their welcome according to their means, for it is of public notoriety that no one with an income gives himself up to Themis, and that every clerk is rather severely kept in check by his father and mother. And so we record with unstinted praise the conduct of Madame Clapart, the widow of her first husband, Monsieur Husson, the father of the candidate, who, let us say, is worthy of the hurrahs that were shouted at dessert; which all of us have signed."

Three clerks had already been caught by this mystification, and three real receptions were recorded in this imposing register.

The day of the arrival of each neophyte in the office, the little clerk had put in their place on their memorandum tablets the *architriclino-basochiennes* archives, and the clerks enjoyed the sight presented by the countenance of the new-comer whilst he was studying these comic pages. *Inter pocula*, all of the candidates had learned the secret of this basochian farce; and this revelation inspired them, as was hoped, with the desire of mystifying the clerks to come.

The reader may now imagine the expression assumed by the four clerks and the junior clerk at these words of Oscar's, who had in his turn become a mystifier:

"Bring out the book!"

Ten minutes after this exclamation, a handsome young man, of fine figure and pleasant countenance, presented himself, asked for Monsieur Desroches, and unhesitatingly gave his name to Godeschal.

"I am Frédéric Marest," he said, "and have come to take the place of third clerk here."

"Monsieur Husson," said Godeschal to Oscar, "show the gentleman his place, and initiate him into the habits of our work."

Next day the clerk found the book laid across his desk; but after having run through the first pages of it, he took to laughing, did not invite the office, and replaced it in front of him.

"Gentlemen," he said, just as he was leaving about five o'clock, "I have a first cousin who is notary's clerk with Master Léopold Hannequin, and I will consult him as to what I should do in regard to my welcome."

"That's bad," Godeschal exclaimed, "that future magistrate does not act like a novice!"

"We will tease him," said Oscar.

Next day, at two o'clock, Oscar saw entering, and recognized in the person of Hannequin's chief clerk, Georges Marest.

"Well! behold Ali Pasha's friend," he exclaimed in an off-hand way.

"What! you here, ambassador," Georges replied, remembering Oscar.

"Well, you know each other, then?" Godeschal asked Georges.

"I think so, indeed; we did stupid things together," said Georges, "but that was over two years ago. Yes, I left Crottat's to go to Hannequin's, precisely because of that affair."

"What affair?" Godeschal asked.

"Oh! nothing," Georges replied on a sign from Oscar. "We wanted to mystify a peer of France, and it was he who threw us. Ah, there! you want, then, to put up a job on my cousin—"

"We put up no jobs," Oscar said, with dignity, "this is our charter."

And he offered the famous register open at a place where was a sentence of exclusion issued against a

refractory who, from stinginess, had been forced to leave the office in 1788.

"Indeed, I think it's a job, for here are its marks," Georges replied, as he pointed to those mock archives. "But we, my cousin and I, are rich; we will get up a feast such as you have never had, and that will stimulate your imagination for reporting. To-morrow, Sunday, at the *Rocher de Cancale* at two o'clock. Afterward I will bring you to spend the evening at the house of the Marquise de las Florentinas y Cabirolos, where we will play and where you will find the pick of the women of fashion. So, gentlemen of the committing tribunal," he continued with notarial haughtiness, "you must dress, and know how to carry wine like the lords of the Regency—"

"Hurrah!" exclaimed the office as with one voice. "Bravo!—Very well! Long life! Long live the Marests!—"

"Pontins!" exclaimed the junior clerk.

"Well, what's the matter there?" the master asked as he looked out of his private office. "Ah! it's you, Georges," he said to the chief clerk; "I see what you're after; you have come to corrupt my clerks."

And he went into his private office and called Oscar thither.

"Look ye, here are five hundred francs," he said to him as he opened his cash box; "go to the Palais and get from the Registrar of Decrees the judgment in the case of Vandenesse vs. Vandenesse, we must

effect service this evening, if possible. I have promised a fee of twenty francs to Simon; wait for the decision, if it is not ready; don't allow yourself to be talked out of it, for Derville is capable, in his client's interest, of putting difficulties in our way. Comte Felix Vandenesse is more powerful than his brother, the ambassador, our client. So keep your eyes open, and on the slightest difficulty come back and consult me."

Oscar left with the intention of distinguishing himself in this little skirmish, the first affair that offered itself since his installation.

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After the departure of Georges and Oscar, Godeschal broached to his new clerk the pleasantry concealed, in his opinion, under this Marquise de las Florentinas y Cabirolos; but Frédéric, with a *procureur-général's* coolness and seriousness, continued his cousin's mystification; by his way of answering and by his mannerisms he persuaded the whole office that the Marquise de las Florentinas was the widow of a Spanish grandee, to whom his cousin was paying court. Born in Mexico and the daughter of a Creole, this young and rich widow was distinguished for the easy manners of women born in those climates.

"She likes to laugh, she likes to drink, she likes to sing as we do!" he said in a low voice, quoting Béranger's famous song. "Georges," he added, "is very rich; he has inherited from his father who was a widower, who left him an income of eighteen thousand francs, and with the twelve thousand francs that our uncle has just left each of us, he has thirty thousand a year. And so he has paid his debts and is giving up the notaryship. He hopes to be Marquis de las Florentinas, for the young widow is a marchioness in her own right and is privileged to bestow her titles on her husband."

If the clerks remained extremely doubtful in regard to the marchioness, the double prospect of

a breakfast at the *Rocher de Cancale* and that fashionable evening threw them into excessive joy. They were *all reserved* in regard to the Spanish woman, so as to judge of her as a *last resort* when they appeared in her presence.

This Marquise de las Florentinas y Cabirolos was merely Mademoiselle Agathe-Florentine Cabirolle, first dancer at the Gaîté theatre, at whose house Uncle Cardot sang *La Mère Godichon.* A year after the very reparable loss of the late Madame Cardot, the happy merchant met Florentine as she was leaving the Coulon class. Struck by the beauty of this choregraphical flower—Florentine was then thirteen—the retired merchant followed her as far as the Rue Pastourelle, where he had the pleasure of learning that the future ornament of the ballet owed her life to a mere portress. In a fortnight the mother and the daughter, settled in the Rue de Crussol, enjoyed modest comfort there. It was, then, to that protector of the arts, as the stereotyped phrase has it, that the stage is indebted for this talent. That generous Mecænas then made these two creatures almost wild with joy by offering them mahogany furniture, hangings, rugs and a full supply of kitchen utensils; he enabled them to engage a housekeeper, and gave them two hundred and fifty francs a month. Old Cardot, adorned with his pigeon wings, then seemed to be an angel, and was treated as a benefactor ought to be. To the good man's passion it was the *golden age.*

For three years the singer of *La Mère Godichon*

had a high time of it supporting Mademoiselle Cabirolle and her mother in this little tenement, only a few steps from the theatre; then, out of love for choregraphy, he employed Vestris as master to his protégée. And so, about 1820, he had the happiness of seeing Florentine dancing her first step in the ballet of a spectacular melodrama entitled the *Ruins of Babylon.* Florentine had then seen sixteen Springs. Some time after this start, old Cardot had already become *an old skinflint* in regard to his protégée; but, as he had the delicacy to understand that a stage dancer at the Gaité had a certain rank to maintain, he raised his monthly assistance to five hundred francs, and if he did not become an angel again, he was at least *a friend for life,* a second father. It was the *silver age.*

From 1820 to 1823, Florentine acquired the experience which all dancing girls ought to enjoy from ninteen until twenty-three. Among her friends were the illustrious Mariette and Tullia, two leading stars of the Opéra; Florine, then poor Coralie, so soon carried off from the arts, from love and from Camusot. As little old Cardot had on his part added five more years to his life, he had fallen into the indulgence of that half-paternalism that old men conceive for young persons of talent, whom they have brought up and whose success has become theirs. Moreover, where and how would a man of sixty-eight have formed a new, like attachment, found another Florentine, who so well knew his habits and at whose house he could sing with his

friends *La Mère Godichon?* Little old Cardot accordingly found himself under a yoke that was half conjugal and of irresistible force. It was the *bronze age.*

During the five years of the gold and silver ages Cardot saved ninety thousand francs. This old man, full of experience, had foreseen that when he would reach three-score and ten Florentine would be in her majority; she would, perhaps, make her début at the Opéra, no doubt she would want to display the splendor of a star of the first magnitude. Some days before the evening in question old Cardot had spent forty-five thousand francs in order to put his Florentine on a certain footing, and he had re-engaged for her the old tenement in which the late Coralie had made Camusot happy. In Paris there are tenements and houses as there are streets that are predestined. Enriched by a magnificent display of silver, the Gaîté theatre star gave fine dinners, spent three hundred francs a month on her toilet, no longer went out except in a livery carriage, and had a chambermaid, a cook and a little lackey. In short, they were ambitious to make a first appearance at the Opéra. The *Cocon d'Or* then did homage to its former head for its most splendid products in order to please Mademoiselle Cabirolle, called Florentine, as it had, three years before, supplied Coralie's wants, but always unknown to old Cardot's daughter, for father and son-in-law understood each other wonderfully well, in order to preserve decorum in the bosom of the

family. Madame Camusot knew nothing of her husband's dissipations nor of her father's morals. The magnificence, then, that shone in the Rue de Vendôme, at Mademoiselle Florentine's would have satisfied the most ambitious of supernumeraries. After having been master for seven years, Cardot felt himself drawn along in tow to a power of unlimited caprice. But the unfortunate old man was in love! Florentine was to close his eyes for him, and he intended to bequeath to her a hundred thousand francs. The *iron age* had set in.

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Georges Marest, worth an income of thirty thousand francs, a handsome young man, courted Florentine. All *danseuses* pretend to love as their protectors love them, to have a young man who escorts them when out walking and arranges silly country parties for them. Though disinterested, the fancy of a star is always a passion that costs a trifle to the *happy chosen mortal.* It is dinners at the restaurants, boxes at the theatre, carriages to go out into the environs of Paris and return, choice wines profusely consumed, for dancing girls live as formerly lived athletes. Georges amused himself as young men amuse themselves who pass from paternal discipline to independence, and his uncle's death, almost doubling his means, changed his ideas. As long as he had only the eighteen thousand francs income left by his father and mother, his intention was to be a notary; but, according to his cousin's remarks to Desroches' clerks, one must be stupid to enter on a profession with the means that one has when one leaves it. Accordingly, the chief clerk celebrated his first day of liberty by that breakfast which served at the same time to pay his cousin's welcome. Wiser than Georges, Frédéric persisted in following an administrative career. As a handsome young man, as well formed and as experienced as Georges, might very well marry a rich Creole,—as,

according to Frédéric's statement to his future comrades, the Marquis de las Florentinas y Cabirolos had indeed been able to do in his old days, in taking as wife a pretty girl rather than a noble one,—the clerks of Desroches' office, all sprung from poor families, never having frequented fashionable society, put on their best clothes, all rather impatient to see the Mexican Marquise de las Florentinas y Cabirolos.

"What a happiness," said Oscar to Godeschal on getting up in the morning, "it is to me to have ordered a new coat, trousers and waistcoat, a pair of boots, and for my dear mother to have made a new outfit for me on the occasion of my promotion to the rank of second clerk! I have six frilled shirts of fine linen out of the twelve that she gave me. We are now going to show ourselves off! Ah! if one of us could carry off the marchioness from that Georges Marest—"

"What a fine occupation for a clerk in Master Desroches' office!" Godeschal exclaimed. "You will never, then, overcome your vanity, you naughty boy?"

"Ah! sir," said Madame Clapart, who came to bring cravats to her son and who heard the chief clerk's remark, "God grant that my Oscar follow your good advice. That's what I have been constantly telling him: 'Imitate Monsieur Godeschal; listen to his counsels!'"

"He is going, madame," the chief clerk replied, "but he will not have to make many mistakes like

that of yesterday to ruin himself in his master's estimation. The master does not understand that one knows not how to succeed. As a first trial in business, he instructs your son to get a copy of the judgment in an affair of succession in which two great lords, two brothers, are in litigation, and Oscar allowed himself to be hoodwinked.—The master was furious. I had as much as I could do to repair this stupid blunder by going this morning at ten o'clock to see the registry clerk, from whom I got assurance of having judgment given at half-past seven to-morrow."

"Ah!" Oscar exclaimed as he went to his first clerk and clasped his hand, "you are indeed a true friend."

"Ah! sir," said Madame Clapart, "a mother is happy in knowing that her son has a friend such as you, and you may count on a gratitude that will end only with my life. Oscar, do not trust that Georges Marest, he has already been the cause of your first misfortune in life."

"In what respect, then?" Godeschal asked.

The too confiding mother then briefly explained to the chief clerk the adventure that had happened to her poor Oscar in the Pierrotin coach.

"I feel sure," said Godeschal, "that that joker has put up some trick on us for this evening.—As for me, I will not go to the Marquise de las Florentinas'; my sister needs me for the stipulating of a new engagement, I will leave you, then, at dessert; but, Oscar, be on your guard. They will try perhaps

to make you gamble, and Desroches' office must not be backward. Well, you will play for both of us, here are a hundred francs," said that good young man as he gave that sum to Oscar, whose purse was going to be emptied by the shoemaker and the tailor. "Be prudent; do not think of playing beyond your hundred francs; do not let yourself be fuddled either by the game or by drinking. *Saperlotte!* a second clerk has some standing, he ought not to play on tick, nor exceed a certain limit in anything. Once a second clerk, one ought to think of becoming an attorney. So neither drink too much nor play too much, but keep a proper bearing, that is your rule of conduct. Especially do not forget to be home by midnight, for tomorrow you must be at the Palais at seven o'clock to get your decree there. It is not forbidden to amuse one's self, but business first."

"Are you paying close attention, Oscar?" said Madame Clapart. "See how indulgent Monsieur Godeschal is, and how well he knows how to combine the pleasures of youth with the obligations of his profession."

Madame Clapart, on seeing the tailor and the shoemaker arrive and make their demands on Oscar, remained alone for a moment with the chief clerk, to pay him back the hundred francs that he had just given.

"Ah! sir," she said to him, "a mother's blessing will follow you everywhere and in all your undertakings."

The mother was then supremely happy in seeing her son well dressed; she brought him a gold watch bought out of her savings, as a reward for his conduct.

"You will draw a lot in the conscription a week from now," she said to him, "and as it is necessary to make provision, in case you should draw an unlucky number, I have gone to see your Uncle Cardot; he is quite satisfied with you. Delighted to know you were a second clerk at twenty, and at your success in the Law School examinations, he has promised the money necessary to buy you a substitute. Do you not feel a certain satisfaction at seeing how good conduct is rewarded? If you suffer privations, think of the happiness of being able to negotiate for an office five years from now. In fine, my dear boy, think how happy you make your mother."

Oscar's countenance, somewhat thin from study, had assumed an appearance on which business habits had impressed a serious expression. He had stopped growing, and his beard had sprouted. Youth at last made way for manhood. The mother could not help admiring her son, and she embraced him tenderly, saying to him:

"Amuse yourself, but remember this good Monsieur Godeschal's advice. Ah! look here, I was forgetting. Here is our friend Moreau's present, a pretty pocket-book."

"I need it so much the more as the master has given me five hundred francs to get that damned

decision in the case of Vandenesse vs. Vandenesse and that I do not want to leave the money in my room."

"You are going to keep it on your person?" the mother said, frightened. "And if you should lose such a sum! Shouldn't you rather entrust it to Monsieur Godeschal?"

"Godeschal!" exclaimed Oscar, who thought his mother's idea an excellent one.

Godeschal, like all clerks on Sunday, had his time to himself between ten and two o'clock, and had already gone out.

When his mother had left him, Oscar went to stroll on the boulevards while waiting for breakfast time. Why not parade that fine toilet which he wore with a pride and a pleasure that will be recalled by all young men who have been in straitened circumstances in their early life? A pretty cashmere waistcoat with blue ground and shawl pattern, black cassimere trousers with pleats, a close-fitting black coat and a cane with a gilded knob bought out of his savings were the cause of rather natural joy to this poor youth, who thought of the way he was dressed on the day of the journey to Presles, remembering the effect that Georges had then produced on him. Oscar had in perspective a day of delights, that evening he was to see fashionable society for the first time! Let us acknowledge it; in a clerk to whom pleasures were denied and who, for such a long time, had aspired to some debauch, the feelings, once they were

unchained, might lead to forgetfulness of the wise advice of Godeschal and his mother. To the shame of youth, never are advice and warning wanting. Besides the recommendations of the morning, Oscar felt in himself a feeling of aversion against Georges; he felt himself humiliated in the presence of this witness to the scene in the parlor at Presles, when Moreau had flung him at the feet of the Comte de Sérizy. The moral order has its laws, they are implacable, and one is always punished for having disregarded them. There is especially one that the animal itself obeys without discussion, and always. It is that which orders us to shun anyone who has injured us a first time, either intentionally or unintentionally, voluntarily or involuntarily. The creature from which we have received injury or displeasure will always be fatal to us. Whatever be its rank, by whatever degree of affection it belongs to us, we must break with it, it is sent to us by our evil genius. Though the Christian feeling is opposed to this conduct, obedience to this terrible law is essentially social and conservative. The daughter of James II., who sat on her father's throne, must have inflicted more than one wound on him before the usurpation. Judas had certainly aimed some murderous blow at Jesus before betraying Him. There is an internal vision in us, the eye of the soul, which has a presentiment of catastrophes, and the repugnance that we feel for this fatal being is the result of this foresight; if religion orders us to overcome it, there remains to us

distrust, to the voice of which we should never cease to listen. Could Oscar at twenty have so much wisdom? Alas! when, at half-past two, Oscar entered the salon of the *Rocher de Cancale*, where were three invited guests, besides the clerks, namely, an old captain of dragoons named Giroudeau; Finot, a journalist who might obtain for Florentine a début at the Opéra; Du Bruel, an author who was a friend of Tullia, one of Mariette's rivals at the Opéra, the second clerk felt his secret hostility vanishing at the first handshakings, in the first transports of a conversation between young folks, in front of a table of twelve covers splendidly served. Georges, moreover, was charming to Oscar.

"You," he said to him, "follow private diplomacy; for what difference is there between an ambassador and an attorney? Only that which separates a nation from an individual. Ambassadors are the attorneys of peoples! If I can be of any service to you, come and see me."

"On my word," said Oscar, "I can acknowledge to you to-day that you have been the cause of a great misfortune to me—"

"Bah!" Georges remarked after having listened to the story of the clerk's tribulations; "but it was Monsieur de Sérizy that behaved himself badly. His wife—I wouldn't want her. And it is all very well for the count to be a minister of State, a peer of France, I wouldn't want to be in his red skin. He is a small-minded man; I hold him in great contempt now."

Oscar listened with real pleasure to Georges' pleasantries regarding the Comte de Sérizy, for they to some extent lessened the gravity of his error; and he entered fully into the hateful feeling of the notary's ex-clerk, who amused himself with predicting for the nobility the misfortunes that the middle-class was then dreaming of, and that 1830 was to realize. At half-past three they began to officiate. Dessert appeared only at eight o'clock. Each course took up two hours. Only clerks can eat so! Stomachs from eighteen to twenty are, to the medical faculty, inexplicable facts. The wines were worthy of Borrel, who at that time filled the place of the illustrious Balaine, the creator of the first of Parisian restaurants as to the delicacy and perfection of cooking; that is to say, of the entire world.

They drew up the report of this Balthasar's feast at dessert, by beginning with: *Inter pocula aurea restauranti, qui vulgo dicitur Rupes Cancali.* From this beginning the reader may imagine the fine page that was added to this golden book of basochian banquets.

Godeschal disappeared after having signed, leaving the eleven fellow-guests, stimulated by the old captain of the Imperial Guard, to give themselves up to the wines, toasts and liqueurs of a dessert, the pyramids of fruits and choice dainties of which resembled the obelisks of Thebes. At half-past ten the junior clerk of the office was in a condition that did not allow him to remain any longer; Georges

packed him in a hack, gave his mother's address and paid for the jaunt. The ten fellow-guests, all tipsy as Pitt and Dundas, then spoke of going on foot along the boulevards, seeing how fine the weather was, to the house of the Marquise de las Florentinas y Cabirolos, where, about midnight, they were to find the most brilliant society. All were most anxious to fill their lungs with fresh air; but, with the exception of Georges, Giroudeau, Du Bruel and Finot, who were accustomed to the orgies of Paris, not one was able to walk. Georges sent after three road wagons to a livery stable and paraded his people for an hour on the outer boulevards, from Montmartre to the Barrière du Trône. They returned by way of Bercy, the quays and the boulevards, as far as the Rue de Vendôme.

The clerks were still fluttering in the heaven filled with fancies into which drunkenness carries young men, when their Amphitryon introduced them into Florentine's parlors. There, shone theatrical princesses who, no doubt informed of Frédéric's pleasantry, amused themselves by aping the women of fashion. They then partook of ices. The lighted candles made the candelabras glare. The lackeys of Tullia, of Madame du Val-Noble and of Florine, all in full livery, served dainties on silver platters. The hangings, masterpieces of Lyonnaise industry, fastened with gold cords, dazzled the eye. The carpet flowers made the room look like a garden. Knickknacks of the richest kind, and curiosities, fluttered before the gaze. In the first moment, and in

the condition in which Georges had put them, the clerks, and especially Oscar, believed in the Marquise de las Florentinas y Cabirolos. Gold glittered on four card-tables arranged in the bedroom. In the salon, the women were indulging in a vingt-et-un held by Nathan, the famous author. After having roamed, tipsy and almost asleep, over the dark outer boulevards, the clerks reawoke, then, in a real Armida's palace. Oscar, presented by Georges to the pretended marchioness, remained quite stupefied, not recognizing the dancing girl of the Gaîté in this woman with an aristocratically décolleté dress, enriched with lace, almost like a keepsake vignette, and who received him with graces and manners that had no analogy in the memory or in the imagination of a clerk so severely trained. After having admired all the richness of that tenement, the pretty women who lived in clover there, and all of whom had emulated one another in toilet for the inauguration of this splendor, Oscar was taken by the hand and led by Florentine to the vingt-et-un table.

"Come and let me present you to the beautiful Marquise d'Anglade, one of my friends—"

And she led poor Oscar to the pretty Fanny Beaupré, who for two years past had taken the place of the late Coralie in Camusot's affections. This young actress had just made a reputation for herself in the rôle of marchioness in a melodrama of the Porte-Saint-Martin entitled *La Famille d'Anglade*, a success of the time.

"Here, my dear," said Florentine, "I present to you a charming youth whom you can get to join in your game."

"Ah! how charming that will be," replied the actress with a seductive smile as she took Oscar's measure; "I am losing, we are going to go halves, are we not?"

"Madame la Marquise, I am at your orders," said Oscar as he sat down beside the pretty actress.

"Put up your money," she said, "I will play it, you will make me happy! Hold, there are my last hundred francs—"

And the false marchioness took out of a purse, the slides of which were adorned with diamonds, five gold pieces. Oscar pulled out his hundred francs in hundred sou pieces, already ashamed to mix ignoble crowns with gold coins. In ten rounds the actress lost the two hundred francs.

"Come, that's stupid!" she exclaimed; "I am going to make the bank, I am. We remain together, do we not?" she said to Oscar.

Fanny Beaupré had stood up, and the young clerk, who saw himself as well as her the object of attention on the part of the entire table, did not dare to withdraw saying that his purse had only the devil as a lodger. Oscar found himself voiceless, his tongue had become heavy and stuck fast to the roof of his mouth.

"Lend me five hundred francs?" asked the actress of the dancer.

Florentine brought five hundred francs which she

had gone to get from Georges, who had just had eight rounds at écarté.

"Nathan has won twelve hundred francs," said the actress to the clerk. "Bankers always win; don't let us look *stupid*," she breathed in his ear.

People who have heart, imagination and impulse will understand how poor Oscar opened his portfolio and took out of it the five hundred franc note. He looked at Nathan, the famous author, who along with Florine took to playing high against the bank.

"Come, my little man, seize it!" Fanny Beaupré called to him as she made a sign to Oscar to pick up two hundred francs that Florine and Nathan had punted.

The actress did not spare pleasantry and raillery on those who lost. She enlivened the game with tricks that Oscar found quite singular; but joy stifled these reflections, for the first two rounds brought a gain of two thousand francs. Oscar was anxious to feign indisposition and fly, leaving his partner there; but *honor* nailed him to the spot. Three other rounds carried off the winnings. Oscar felt a cold perspiration running down his back, he was completely brought to his senses. The last two rounds carried off the thousand francs of the common stake; Oscar was thirsty, and swallowed in quick succession three glasses of iced punch. The actress led the poor clerk into the bedroom, cajoling him with idle stories. But when there the sense of his error so overwhelmed Oscar, to whom Desroches' figure appeared as in a dream, that he

went and sat on a magnificent ottoman in a dark corner; he put a handkerchief to his eyes; he wept! Florentine noticed this pose of sorrow that has a character of sincerity and which ought to arrest the attention of a mimic; she ran to Oscar, removed the band from his eyes, saw the tears, and led him into a boudoir.

"What ails you, my little man?" she asked him.

To this voice, to these words, to the accent, Oscar, who recognized a maternal kindness in the goodness of such girls, replied:

"I have lost five hundred francs that my master gave to get out a judgment to-morrow, I have nothing left for me to do but throw myself into the river; I am dishonored.—"

"What a fool you are!" said Florentine. "Stay there, I will go and bring you a thousand francs, you will try to win back all; but risk only five hundred francs, so as to keep your master's money. Georges plays écarté swaggeringly, bet on him.—"

In the difficult position in which Oscar found himself, he accepted the proposition made by the mistress of the house.

"Ah!" he said to himself, "only marchionesses are capable of such traits as those.—Beautiful, noble and superlatively rich! how happy is that Georges!"

He received the thousand francs in gold from Florentine, and came to bet on his mystifier. Georges had already passed four times, when Oscar came and took his place by his side. With pleasure

did the gamblers see this new better coming, for all, with the instinct of gamblers, took sides with Giroudeau, the old officer of the Empire.

"Gentlemen," said Georges, "you will be punished for your desertion, I feel myself in the vein. Come, Oscar, we will swamp them!"

Georges and his partner lost five consecutive rounds. After having squandered his thousand francs, Oscar, who was seized with the rage for play, wanted to take the cards. As the result of a chance rather common to those who play for the first time, he won; but Georges turned his head by his advice; he told him to throw certain cards, and often snatched them from his hands, so that the struggle between these two wills, these two inspirations, injured the run of luck. And so, about three o'clock in the morning, after returns of fortune and unexpected gains, always drinking punch, Oscar got to have only a hundred francs. He arose with a heavy and addled head, advanced a few steps and fell on a sofa in the boudoir, his eyes closed in a leaden sleep.

"Mariette," said Fanny Beaupré to Godeschal's sister, who had arrived at two o'clock in the morning, "will you dine here to-morrow, my Camusot will be here with old Cardot, we will set them wild?—"

"What!" exclaimed Florentine, "but my old chap has not notified me."

"He is to come this morning to tell you that he will sing *La Mère Godichon*," Fanny Beaupré

continued; "it is indeed the least that this poor man can do, to make a present of the tenement."

"May the devil take him with his orgies!" Florentine exclaimed. "He and his son-in-law are worse than magistrates or than theatre managers. After all one dines very well here, Mariette," she said to the Opera star, "Cardot always orders the bill of fare at Chevet's; come with your Duc de Maufrigneuse, we will laugh, we will make them dance like Tritons!"

On hearing Cardot's and Camusot's names mentioned, Oscar made an effort to overcome sleep; but he could only stammer a word that was not heard, and fell back on the silk cushion.

"Well, you have provisions for your night," Fanny Beaupré said, laughing, to Florentine.

"Oh! the poor boy! he is drunk from punch and from despair. He is the second clerk in the office in which your brother is," said Florentine to Mariette; "he has lost the money that his master had entrusted to him on business connected with the office. He wanted to kill himself, and I loaned him a thousand francs, which those brigands Finot and Giroudeau won from him. Poor innocent!"

"But we must wake him up," said Mariette; "my brother does not daliy, nor his master either."

"Oh! wake him up if you can, and take him away," said Florentine, as she returned to her parlors to receive the farewells of those who were departing.

They started to dance what are called character

dances, and when daylight dawned Florentine went to bed, fatigued, forgetting Oscar, of whom nobody thought, but who slept a most sound sleep.

About eleven o'clock in the morning, a terrible voice woke up the clerk who, recognizing his uncle Cardot, thought he would get out of his embarrassment by feigning sleep and hiding his face in the fine yellow velvet cushion on which he had spent the night.

"Verily, my little Florentine," said the respectable old man, "it is neither wise nor genteel, you danced yesterday in *Les Ruines* and you spent the night in an orgie. But that is like wanting to destroy your freshness, without reckoning that there is real ingratitude in your inaugurating these magnificent rooms without me, with strangers, without my knowledge!—Who knows what has happened?"

"Old monster!" Florentine exclaimed, "have you not a key to enter at any hour and at any moment here? The ball ended at half-past five, and you are so cruel as to wake me up at eleven o'clock!"

"Half-past eleven, Titine," humbly remarked Cardot; "I rose very early so as to order at Chevet's a dinner fit for an archbishop.—They have spoiled your carpets; what kind of people did you receive, then?"—

"You should not complain about it, for Fanny Beaupré told me that you were coming with Camusot, and, to give you pleasure, I invited Tullia, Du Bruel, Mariette, the Duc de Maufrigneuse, Florine and Nathan. So you will have the five finest

creatures that have ever seen the footlights and they will dance Zephira steps for you."

"It is suicide to lead such a life!" old Cardot exclaimed. "How many broken glasses! what pillage! the antechamber makes one shudder—"

At that moment the agreeable old man stood stupid and as if charmed, like a bird attracted by a reptile. He observed the profile of a young body dressed in black cloth.

"Ah! Mademoiselle Cabirolle!" he said at last.

"Well, what is it?" she asked.

The dancing girl's look was turned in the same direction as that of little old Cardot; and, when she recognized the second clerk, she was seized with a mad fit of laughter that not only interrupted the old man, but that compelled Oscar to show himself, for Florentine took him by the arm and shook with laughter on seeing the two contrite countenances of the uncle and nephew.

"You here, nephew?"—

"Ah! it's your nephew?" Florentine exclaimed, as her wild laughter broke out again. "You have never spoken to me of that nephew. Mariette did not take you away, then?" she said to Oscar, who remained as though petrified. "What's going to become of this poor boy?"

"Whatever he pleases," dryly replied goodman Cardot, who walked toward the door as if to leave.

"A moment, Papa Cardot, you are going to get your nephew out of the scrape he has got into through my fault, for he gambled with his master's

money, five hundred francs, which he lost, besides a thousand francs of mine that I gave him so that he might retrieve himself."

"You wretch, you have lost fifteen hundred francs at play, at your age?"

"Oh! uncle," exclaimed poor Oscar, whom these words plunged to the bottom of the horror of his position, and who threw himself on his knees before his uncle, with clasped hands. "It is noon, I am lost, dishonored.—Monsieur Desroches will be pitiless! An important affair is involved on which he stakes his self-respect. I was to have gone this morning to get from the registry clerk the judgment in the case of Vandenesse vs. Vandenesse! What has happened?—What's going to become of me?—Save me in remembrance of my father and my aunt!—Come with me to Monsieur Desroches', explain my case to him, find excuses—"

These phrases were launched through tears and sobs that would have affected the sphinxes of the Luxor desert.

"Well, old skinflint," the dancing girl exclaimed as she wept, "will you let your own nephew be dishonored, the son of the man to whom you owe your fortune, for his name is Oscar Husson? Save him, or Titine gives you up for her lord."

"But how comes he to be here?" the old man asked.

"Well! by having forgotten the hour for going to get the judgment that he speaks of; don't you see that he has been drinking, that he fell in a heap

there from sleep and fatigue? Georges and his cousin Frédéric gave a feast yesterday to Desroches' clerks at the *Rocher de Cancale.*"

Old Cardot looked hesitatingly at the dancing girl.

"Come, then, old monkey, wouldn't I have concealed him better if it were otherwise?" she exclaimed.

"Well, here are five hundred francs, you simpleton!" said Cardot to his nephew, "it is all that you will ever have from me! Go and settle with your master, if you can. I will pay the thousand francs that this young lady has loaned you; but I do not want ever again to hear your name mentioned."

Oscar fled, not wishing to hear any more; but once in the street, he knew not where to go.

*

The chance that ruins people and the chance that saves them made equal efforts for and against Oscar on that terrible morning; but he was to succumb with a master who did not let up on an affair once it was spoiled. On returning home, Mariette, frightened at what might happen to her brother's pupil, had written a note to Godeschal in which she enclosed a five hundred franc bill, telling her brother of the drunkenness and misfortunes that had befallen Oscar. This good girl went to sleep after having told her chambermaid to be sure and go with this package to Desroches' before seven o'clock. On his part Godeschal, as he got up at six o'clock, found no Oscar. He saw into it all. He took five hundred francs out of his savings, and ran to the court clerk to get the judgment so as to have the intimation of it ready for Desroches' signature at eight o'clock. Desroches, who always got up at four, entered his office at seven. Mariette's chambermaid, not finding her mistress's brother in his mansard, went down to the office, and was there received by Desroches, to whom naturally she presented the package.

"Is it on office business?" the master asked. "I am Monsieur Desroches."

"Look at it, sir," said the chambermaid.

Desroches opened the letter and read it. On

seeing in it the five hundred franc note, he went back into his private office, furious against his second clerk. At half-past seven he heard Godeschal dictating the intimation of judgment to the assistant chief clerk, and a few moments after, the good Godeschal entered his master's room in triumph.

"Was it Oscar Husson who went this morning to Simon's?" Desroches asked.

"Yes, sir," Godeschal replied.

"Who, then, gave him the money?" remarked the attorney.

"You," said Godeschal, "on Saturday."

"It is raining five hundred franc notes, then!" exclaimed Desroches.

"See here, Godeschal, you are a fine fellow; but little Husson does not merit so much generosity. I hate imbeciles, but still more do I hate people who make mistakes in spite of the paternal care that one bestows on them." He gave Godeschal Mariette's letter and the five hundred franc note that she had sent. "You will excuse me for having opened it," he continued; "your sister's servant told me it was an office affair. You will dismiss Oscar."

"The poor, unhappy boy, what harm he has done me!" said Godeschal. "That big good-for-nothing, Georges Marest, is his evil genius, he must shun him as he would the plague; for I do not know what mischief he might do by a third meeting."

"How is that?" said Desroches.

Godeschal briefly told about the mystification on

the journey to Presles. "Ah!" said the attorney, "on one occasion Joseph Bridau spoke to me of that farce; it is to that meeting that we owe the Comte de Sérizy's favor in behalf of his brother."

Just then Moreau made his appearance, for there was a matter of importance to him in this Vandenesse succession. The marquis wanted to sell piecemeal the Vandenesse estate, and his brother the count was opposed to this. The real estate broker then felt the first shock of the just complaints and sinister prophecies that Desroches was fulminating against his ex-second clerk, and as a result there flashed on the mind of this unfortunate youth's most ardent protector the opinion that Oscar's vanity was incorrigible.

"Make a barrister of him," said Desroches, "he has now only his thesis to pass; in that trade his faults will, perhaps, become qualities, for self-esteem gives tongue to half the barristers."

At that moment Clapart, who had fallen sick, was attended by his wife, a difficult task, a duty without any recompense. The employee tormented this poor creature, who until then had not realized what atrocious vexations and venomous sulkiness a half imbecile man, whom poverty has made sullenly furious, allows himsef to indulge in during a whole day's private conversation. Delighted to be able to thrust a poisoned dart into the feeling corner of that mother's heart, he had to some extent guessed at the apprehensions that Oscar's future conduct and faults inspired in this poor woman. Indeed,

when a mother has received from her child a blow like that of the Presles affair, she is in a continual state of panic, and by the way in which his wife boasted every time that he achieved a success, Clapart recognized the extent of the mother's secret uneasiness, and he kept it awake on every occasion.

"At last, Oscar is getting along better than I had hoped; I felt certain that his journey to Presles was only an inconsistency of youth. What young men are there who do not make mistakes? That poor child! he bears up heroically against the privations that he would not have known if his poor father had lived. God grant that he know how to restrain his passions!" etc.

Now, while so many catastrophes were happening in the Rue de Vendôme and the Rue de Béthisy, Clapart, seated in the chimney-corner, enveloped in a mean dressing-gown, was looking at his wife, who was engaged in preparing at the same time on the bedroom hearth broth tisane for Clapart and her own breakfast.

"Oh God! I would like very much to know how yesterday's doings ended. Oscar was to banquet at the *Rocher de Cancale* and go in the evening to a marchioness's—"

"Oh! don't be uneasy, sooner or later the mystery will be unfolded," her husband said to her. "Do you really believe in that marchioness? Come, now! A young man who has sense, after all, and expensive tastes, like Oscar, finds marchionesses in

Spain, but at the price of gold! He will fall back some morning on your hands with debts—"

"You know only how to suggest ideas that may drive me to despair!" Madame Clapart exclaimed. "You complained that my son was eating your salary, and never did he cost you anything. For two whole years you have had no pretext for speaking ill of Oscar, now there he is second clerk, his uncle and Monsieur Moreau provide for everything, and he has, moreover, eight hundred francs salary. If we have bread in our old days we will owe it to that dear child. In truth, you are so unjust—"

"You call my foresight injustice!" the sick man harshly replied.

At that moment a sharp ringing was heard. Madame Clapart ran to open the door and remained in the outer room with Moreau, who came to break the force of the blow that Oscar's fresh levity was to inflict on his poor mother.

"What! he lost office money?" Madame Clapart exclaimed, weeping.

"Hm! I told you so!" Clapart exclaimed, as he showed himself like a spectre at the parlor door, whither curiosity had attracted him.

"But what are we going to do with him?" asked Madame Clapart, whose grief made her insensible to this thrust of Clapart's.

"If he bore my name," Moreau replied, "I would be satisfied with seeing him drafted in the conscription; and if he drew an unlucky number, I would not pay for a man to be his substitute. This is the

second time that your son has blundered from vanity. Well, vanity will, perhaps, inspire him with brilliant deeds, which will recommend him in that career. Moreover, six years of military service will balance his head; and, as he has only his thesis to pass, he will not be so badly off at finding himself a barrister at twenty-six, if he wants to follow the business of the bar after having, as the saying is, paid the blood tax. This time, at least, he will have been punished severely, he will have gained experience, and contracted the habit of subordination. Before making his probation at the Palais, he will have made his probation in life."

"If that is your judgment in regard to a son," said Madame Clapart, "I see that a father's heart in no respect resembles that of a mother. My poor Oscar a soldier?"

"Do you prefer to see him throw himself head foremost into the Seine after having committed a disgraceful deed? He can no longer be an attorney; do you find him wise enough to make him a barrister?—While waiting for the age of reason, what will become of him? He may turn loafer; at least discipline will keep him to you—"

"Can he not go into some other office? His uncle Cardot will certainly pay for his substitute, will meet the charge for his thesis."

At that moment the rumbling of a coach, which contained all of Oscar's effects, announced the unfortunate young man, who was not slow to show himself.

"Ah! there you are, Monsieur Fine-Heart!" Clapart exclaimed.

Oscar embraced his mother and held out to Monsieur Moreau a hand that the latter refused to take. Oscar answered this contempt with a look to which the reproach gave a boldness that he was not supposed to possess.

"Listen, Monsieur Clapart," said the youth who had become a man, "you worry my poor mother devilishly, and it is your right; she is, to her own misfortune, your wife. But as for me, that's a different matter! You will see me reach my majority in a few months. Now, you have no right over me, even while I am a minor. Nothing has ever been asked of you. Thanks to this gentleman here, I have not cost you two farthings, I owe you no sort of gratitude; so, let me alone."

Clapart, on hearing this apostrophe, went back to his easy chair in the chimney-corner. The second clerk's reasoning and the internal wrath of the young man of twenty, who had just received a lesson from his friend Godeschal, imposed silence forever on the sick man's imbecility.

"An impulse to which you would have given way just as much as I when you were my age," said Oscar to Moreau, "has led me to make a mistake that Desroches regards as serious and that is only a peccadillo. I think far more of having taken Florentine of the Gaîté for a marchioness, and actresses for women of fashion, than of having lost fifteen hundred francs during a debauch in which

everybody, even Godeschal, was drunk as a lord. This time, at least, I have injured only myself. Here I stand corrected. If you want to assist me, Monsieur Moreau, I swear to you that the six years during which I was to remain as clerk, before being able to negotiate will pass without—"

"Stop there!" said Moreau; "I have three children, and I cannot undertake to do anything—"

"Well, well," said Madame Clapart to her son, as she cast a look of reproach on Moreau; "your uncle Cardot—"

"There is no longer an uncle Cardot," replied Oscar, who related the scene of the Rue de Vendôme.

Madame Clapart, who felt her limbs give way under the weight of her body, went and fell into a chair in the dining-room as if thunderstruck.

"All misfortunes together!" she said as she fainted.

Moreau took the poor mother in his arms and carried her to the bed in the sleeping-room. Oscar remained motionless and as if thunderstruck.

"You have nothing left to you but to become a soldier," said the real estate broker to Oscar when he returned. "This simpleton Clapart does not seem to me to have three months to live; your mother will be without a sou of income, and should I not reserve for her the little money that I can spare? This it was impossible for me to tell you in your mother's presence. As a soldier you will have bread to eat and you will reflect on life as it is to youths without fortune."

"I may draw a lucky number," said Oscar.

"After that? Your mother has well performed her duties as mother to you; she has given you an education, she had put you on the right road, you have just left it, what will you try? Without money one can do nothing, you know that to-day; and you are not a man to begin a career by taking off your coat and putting on the vest of the mechanic or laborer. Moreover, your mother loves you, do you want to kill her? She would die on seeing you fall so low."

Oscar sat down and no longer restrained his tears, which flowed in abundance. He now understood this language, so completely unintelligible to him at the time of his first error.

"People without means ought to be perfect!" said Moreau without suspecting the depth of this cruel sentence.

"My fate will not long be undecided, I draw the lot the day after to-morrow," Oscar replied. "Between now and then I will resolve on my future."

Moreau, distracted in spite of his severe bearing, left the household of the Rue de la Cerisaie in despair. Three days later Oscar drew No. 27. In the interest of this poor youth the former manager of Presles had the courage to go and ask the Comte de Sérizy to use his influence to get Oscar into the cavalry. Now, the minister of State's son, having been classed among the last on leaving the École Polytechnique, had entered through favor as sub-lieutenant in the Duc de Maufrigneuse's cavalry

regiment. Oscar, then, in his misfortune, had the small happiness of being, on the Comte de Sérizy's recommendation, enrolled in that fine regiment with the promise of being promoted to the rank of quartermaster at the end of a year. So chance put the ex-clerk under the orders of Monsieur de Sérizy's son.

After having languished for several days, so keenly stricken was she by these catastrophes, Madame Clapart let herself be devoured by that remorse that seizes upon mothers, whose conduct was formerly marked with levity and who, in their old age, incline to repentance. She considered herself as an accursed creature. She attributed the miseries of her second marriage and her son's misfortunes to a vengeance from God that made her expiate the faults and pleasures of her youth. This opinion was soon a certainty to her. The poor mother went to confession, for the first time in forty years, to the curate of the church of Saint-Paul, the Abbé Gaudron, who imposed on her the practice of devotion. But a soul so ill-treated and so loving as that of Madame Clapart must become simply pious. The former Aspasia of the Directory wanted to expiate her sins so as to draw down God's blessings on the head of her poor Oscar, ere long, then, she devoted herself to the exercises and works of the tenderest piety. She believed she had attracted the attention of Heaven, after having succeeded in saving Monsieur Clapart, who, thanks to her care, lived to torment her; but she wanted

to see, in the tyrannies of this weak mind, trials inflicted by the hand that caresses while chastising. Oscar, moreover, conducted himself so perfectly that in 1830 he was quartermaster-general in the Vicomte de Sérizy's company, which gave him the rank of sub-lieutenant in the line, the Duc de Maufrigneuse's regiment belonging to the royal guard. Oscar Husson was then twenty-five. As the royal guard always kept garrison at Paris or within a radius of thirty leagues around the capital, he came to see his mother from time to time, and confided to her his sorrows, for he had enough mind to understand that he would never be an officer. At that period the grades in the cavalry were nearly all bestowed on the younger sons of noble families, and men without the particle in their name advanced with difficulty. Oscar's whole ambition was to leave the guard and be appointed sub-lieutenant in a cavalry regiment of the line. In the month of February, 1830, Madame Clapart obtained, through the Abbé Gaudron, who had become pastor of the church of Saint-Paul, the protection of Madame la Dauphine, and Oscar was made a sub-lieutenant.

Though outwardly the ambitious Oscar seemed to be excessively devoted to the Bourbons, in the bottom of his heart the former clerk was a Liberal. And so, in the battle of 1830, he passed over to the people. This defection, whose importance was due to the point to which it was directed, won public attention for Oscar. In the exaltation of triumph,

in the month of August, Oscar, made lieutenant, had the Cross of the Legion of Honor, and succeeded in being attached as aide-de-camp to Lafayette, who secured for him the rank of captain in 1832. When they deposed the admirer of the best of republics from his command-in-chief of the National Guard of the kingdom, Oscar Husson, whose devotedness to the new dynasty bordered on fanaticism, was placed as major of a regiment sent to Africa, at the time of the first expedition undertaken by the Prince Royal. The Vicomte de Sérizy was lieutenant-colonel of this regiment. In the action of the Macta, in which it was found necessary to leave the field to the Arabs, Monsieur de Sérizy was left behind, wounded under his dead horse. Oscar then said to his squadron:

"Gentlemen, it is like going to death, but we should not abandon our colonel."

He was the first to dash upon the Arabs, and his men, electrified, followed him. The Arabs, in the first astonishment that they felt at this offensive and furious return, permitted Oscar to get possession of the vicomte, whom he took on his horse as he fled at full gallop, though in this operation, undertaken in the midst of a horrible mêlée, he received two yataghan blows on the left arm. Oscar's brave conduct was rewarded with the cross of officer of the Legion of Honor and his promotion to the rank of lieutenant-colonel. He lavished the most affectionate attention on the Vicomte de Sérizy, whom his mother came to see, and who died, as is

known, at Toulon, from the effects of his wounds. The Comtesse de Sérizy had not separated her son from him who, after having snatched him from the Arabs, still took care of him so devotedly. Oscar was so severely wounded that the amputation of his left arm was deemed necessary by the surgeon whom the countess brought to her son. The Comte de Sérizy then forgave Oscar for his blunders of the journey to Presles, and regarded himself even as his debtor when he had buried his son, who had become an only son, in the chapel of the château of Sérizy.

Long after the incident of the Macta, an elderly lady dressed in black, giving her arm to a man of thirty-four, and in whom the passers-by could so much the more easily recognize a pensioned officer, as he was minus one arm and wore the rosette of the Legion of Honor in his buttonhole, took her stand, at eight o'clock in the morning, in the month of May, under the gateway of the *Lion d'Argent* hotel, in the Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Denis, no doubt waiting for the departure of a stage-coach. Certainly Pierrotin, the contractor for the service of the Oise valley, and who served it by passing through Saint-Leu-Taverny and L'Isle-Adam as far as Beaumont, was to have some difficulty in discovering in this bronzed officer the little Oscar Husson whom he had formerly carried to Presles. Madame Clapart, at last a widow, was quite as unrecognizable as her son. Clapart, one of the victims of Fieschi's outrage, had served his wife

more by his death than by his whole life. Naturally the unoccupied and strolling Clapart had camped on *his* Boulevard du Temple to look at *his* legion passing in review. The poor devotee had then been kept going on fifteen hundred francs pension for life, by virtue of the law passed on the occasion in behalf of the victims of that infernal machine.

The coach, to which they yoked four dapple-gray horses, that would have been a credit to the Messageries Royales, was divided into coupé, interior, rotunda and imperial. It bore a perfect resemblance to the stage-coaches called gondolas that at present, on the Versailles road, keep up competition with the two railroads. At the same time solid and light, well painted and well put together, lined with fine blue cloth, furnished with spring blinds in Moorish designs and with red morocco cushions, the *Oise Swallow* held nineteen passengers. Pierrotin, though fifty-six years old, had changed but little. Always clad in his blouse, under which he wore a black coat, he smoked his short pipe, as he watched over two liveried agents who were loading many packages on the spacious roof of his coach.

"Are your seats secured?" he asked of Madame Clapart and Oscar while examining them like a man who calls up resemblances in his memory.

"Yes, two interior seats in the name of Bellejambe, my servant," Oscar replied; "he was to have taken them when setting out yesterday evening."

"Ah! the gentleman is the new collector at Beaumont," said Pierrotin, "you take the place of Monsieur Margueron's nephew—"

"Yes," said Oscar, pressing his mother's arm as she was going to speak.

In his turn the officer wanted to remain unknown for some time.

At that moment Oscar jumped as he heard the voice of Georges Marest, who called from the street:

"Pierrotin, have you one more place left?"

"It seems to me that you might call me *monsieur* without tearing your throat!" the contractor of the Oise valley service replied sharply.

Without the sound of his voice Oscar would not have been able to recognize the mystifier who had twice already been so fatal to him. Georges, almost bald, had now left only three or four tufts of hair over his ears, and carefully scattered so as to disguise the nudity of his cranium as much as possible. A corpulency far from becoming, a pyramidal stomach, disfigured the ex-handsome young man's formerly elegant proportions. Having become ignoble in form and bearing, Georges clearly gave evidence of disasters in love and a life of continual debauch, in a pimpled complexion, in distended and, as it were, vinous features. The eyes had lost that brilliancy, that vivacity of youth which wise or studious habits have the power of maintaining. Georges, clad like a man careless of his attire, wore trousers with understraps, but shabby, the style of which required varnished boots. His thick-soled

boots, badly polished, were over three-quarters of a year old, which, in Paris, is equivalent to three years elsewhere. A faded waistcoat, a cravat pretentiously knotted, though it was an old silk handkerchief, betrayed the sort of hidden distress to which a former fop may find himself a prey. In fine, Georges appeared at that hour of the morning in a dress coat, instead of being in an overcoat, an indication of real poverty! That coat, which must have seen more than one ball, had passed, like its owner, from the opulence that it formerly represented to day labor. The seams of the black cloth showed whitish lines, the collar was greasy, use had badly frayed the cuffs. And Georges had the boldness to attract attention by yellow gloves, somewhat dirty indeed, on one of which a signet ring was outlined in black. Around the cravat, passed through a pretentious gold ring, twined a silk chain in imitation of hair and to which, no doubt, a watch was attached. His hat, though rather jauntily put on, revealed more clearly than all these symptoms, the poverty of a man not in a condition to give sixteen francs to a hatter when he is compelled to live from hand to mouth. Florentine's former would-be lover swung a cane with a silver-gilt knob, horribly dented. The blue trousers, the waistcoat of Scotch material, the cravat of sky-blue silk, and the shirt of calico striped with red bands, expressed, in the midst of so many ruins, such a desire to *show off* that this contrast formed not only a spectacle, but also a lesson

"And that's Georges!" Oscar said within himself. "A man whom I left rich to the amount of thirty thousand francs income."

"Has Monsieur *de* Pierrotin another seat to spare in the coupé?" Georges replied, ironically.

"No, my coupé is engaged by a peer of France, Monsieur Moreau's son-in-law, the Baron de Canalis, his wife, and his pretty mother-in-law. There remains only one interior seat."

"The devil! it appears that under all governments peers of France travel by the Pierrotin coaches. I'll take the interior seat," replied Georges, who recalled the adventure with Monsieur de Sérizy.

He cast an examining look on Oscar and the widow, but recognized neither the son nor the mother. Oscar's complexion had been bronzed by the African sun; his mustaches were exceedingly heavy and his whiskers quite ample; his hollowed countenance and his pronounced traits agreed with his military attitude. The officer's rosette, the absent arm, the severe plainness of costume, all would have diverted Georges' recollection, if he had had any recollection of his former victim. As for Madame Clapart, whom Georges had scarcely seen of old, ten years devoted to the exercise of the strictest piety had transformed her. No one would have imagined that this sort of gray nun concealed one of the Aspasias of 1797.

An enormous old man, plainly clad, but in a substantial way, and in whom Oscar recognized old

Léger, arrived slowly and heavily; he familiarly saluted Pierrotin, who seemed to treat him with the respect due, in all countries, to millionaires.

"Well! that's old Léger, ever more and more ponderous," Georges exclaimed.

"To whom have I the honor of speaking?" old Léger asked in a dry tone.

"What! you do not recognize Colonel Georges, the friend of Ali Pasha? We made a journey together one day, along with the Comte de Sérizy, who kept his incognito."

One of the stupidities most habitual to people who have fallen is to want to recognize people and to want to be recognized by them.

"You are very much changed," replied the old real estate dealer, who had become a millionaire twice over.

"Everything changes," said Georges. "See whether the *Lion d'Argent* inn and Pierrotin's coach resemble what they were fourteen years ago."

"Pierrotin has now all to himself the carrying trade of the Oise valley, and he rolls fine coaches," Monsieur Léger replied. "He is a citizen of Beaumont; he keeps a hotel there at which the coaches stop; he has a wife and a daughter who are by no means unintelligent."

An old man of about seventy came down from the hotel and joined the passengers, who were waiting for the time to come to get into the coach.

"Let us start, then, Papa Reybert!" said Léger; "we are now waiting only for your great man."

"Here he comes," said the manager for the Comte de Sérizy, as he pointed to Joseph Bridau.

Neither Georges nor Oscar was able to recognize the illustrious painter, for he presented that wasted appearance that is so famous, and his bearing betrayed the assurance given by success. His black overcoat was adorned with a ribbon of the Legion of Honor. His dress, excessively choice, indicated an invitation to some country feast.

At that moment a clerk, holding a sheet of paper in his hand, came out of an office built in the former kitchen of the *Lion d'Argent* and took his stand in front of the empty coupé.

"Monsieur and Madame de Canalis, three seats!" he called.

He passed to the interior and called in succession:

"Monsieur Bellejambe, two seats. Monsieur de Reybert, three seats. Monsieur—your name?" he said to Georges.

"Georges Marest," the fallen man replied in quite a low voice.

The clerk went toward the rotunda, in front of which trooped nurses, country folks and small shopkeepers who were bidding one another adieu; after having packed in the six passengers the clerk called by their names four young men who mounted the bench on the roof, and said: "Wheel!" as the only order for departure. Pierrotin sat alongside of his driver, a young man in a blouse, who, on his part, called out: "Get up!" to his horses.

The coach, drawn by the four horses bought at

Roye, at an easy trot climbed the hill of the Faubourg Saint-Denis; but once they had arrived above Saint-Laurent, it sped like a mail coach as far as Saint-Denis, in forty minutes. They did not stop at the cheese-cakes inn, and they took to the left of Saint-Denis the Montmorency valley road.

It was on turning there that Georges broke the silence which the passengers had observed until then, while they kept looking at one another.

"We are going a little faster than we did fifteen years ago," said he, as he pulled out a silver watch, "hey! old Léger?"

"People condescend to call me *Monsieur* Léger," the millionaire replied.

"But that's our joker of my first journey to Presles," Joseph Bridau exclaimed. "Well, have you made any fresh campaigns in Asia, Africa or America?" the great painter asked.

"Zounds! I made the Revolution of July, and it was quite enough, for it ruined me—"

"Ah! you made the July Revolution," said the painter. "That does not surprise me, for I never wanted to believe, as I have been told, that it made itself all alone."

"How people meet again," said Monsieur Léger, as he looked at Monsieur de Reybert. "See, Papa Reybert, that's the notary's clerk to whom you no doubt owe the management of the property of the house of Sérizy—"

"We miss the presence of Mistigris, now illustrious under the name of Léon de Lora, and the

little young man who was so stupid as to have spoken to the count of the skin diseases that he at last succeeded in healing, and of his wife whom in time he left to die in peace," said Joseph Bridau.

"The count also is missing," said Reybert.

"Oh! I believe," said Joseph Bridau, in a melancholy tone, "that the last journey he will make will be that from Presles to L'Isle-Adam to attend the ceremony of my marriage."

"He still goes about in a carriage in his park," old Reybert replied.

"Does his wife come often to see him?" Léger asked.

"Once a month," said Reybert. "She is ever fond of Paris; last September she married her niece, Mademoiselle du Rouvre, on whom she has turned all her affections, to a very rich young Pole, Comte Laginski—"

"And to whom," Madame Clapart asked; "will Monsieur de Sérizy's property go?"

"To his wife, who will bury him," Georges replied. "The countess is yet in very good condition for a woman of fifty-four, she is always elegant, and, at a distance, she still looks young—"

"She will so look to you for a long time," then said Léger, who seemed to want to be avenged on his mystifier.

"I respect her," Georges replied to old Léger. "But, by the way, what has become of that manager who, at that time, was dismissed?"

"Moreau?" Léger continued. "Oh! he is deputy for the Oise."

"Ah! he is the famous *centrist* Moreau—of the Oise?—" said Georges.

"Yes," Léger continued, "*Monsieur* Moreau—of the Oise.—He worked a little harder than you in the July Revolution and he succeeded in purchasing the magnificent Pointel estate, between Presles and Beaumont."

"Oh! alongside of that of which he was manager, near his former master, that was rather bad taste," said Georges.

"Don't talk so loud," said Monsieur de Reybert; "for Madame Moreau and her daughter, the Baronne de Canalis, as well as her son-in-law, the former minister, are in the coupé."

"What dowry, then, did he give to get his daughter married to our great orator?"

"Only something like two millions," said old Léger.

"He had a taste for the millions," said Georges smiling and in a low voice; "he began his pile at Presles—"

"Say not another word about Monsieur Moreau!" Oscar exclaimed warmly. "It seems to me that you ought to have learned to hold your tongue in public coaches."

Joseph Bridau looked at the one-armed officer for some seconds, and exclaimed:

"The gentleman is not an ambassador, but his rosette tells us plainly enough that he has got along,

and nobly, for my brother and General Giroudeau have often referred to you in their reports—"

"Oscar Husson!" Georges exclaimed. "On my word! without your voice I'd not have recognized you."

"Ah! this is the gentleman who so courageously snatched the Vicomte Jules de Sérizy from the Arabs?" Reybert asked, "and whom the count has had appointed collector at Beaumont while awaiting the receivership at Pontoise?"

"Yes, sir," said Oscar.

"Well," said the great painter, "you will give me the pleasure, sir, of attending my marriage at L'Isle-Adam."

"Whom are you marrying?" Oscar asked.

"Mademoiselle Léger," the painter replied, "Monsieur de Reybert's granddaughter. It is a marriage that the Comte de Sérizy deigned to prepare for me; I owed him much already as an artist, and, before dying, he desired to take an interest in my fortune, of which I did not dream—"

"Then old Léger married—?" said Georges.

"My daughter," Monsieur de Reybert replied, "and without any dowry."

"He has had children?"

"A daughter. That is quite enough for a man who was a widower and childless," replied old Léger. "Just like Moreau, my partner, I will have a famous man for a son-in-law."

"And," said Georges, as he assumed an almost

respectful air toward old Léger, "you still live at L'Isle-Adam?"

"Yes, I have bought Cassan."

"Well, I am happy in having chosen this day for *doing* the Oise valley," said Georges. "You can be useful to me, gentlemen."

"In what respect?" said Monsieur Léger.

"Ah! in this way," said Georges. "I am an employee of the *Espérance*, a company that has just been formed, and the rules of which are about to be approved by a royal ordinance. This institution gives, at the end of ten years, dowries to young girls, life annuities to the aged; it pays for the education of children; in fine, it takes charge of everybody's fortune—"

"I believe it," said old Léger, smiling. "In a word, you are an assurance solicitor."

"No, sir; I am general inspector, entrusted with securing correspondents and agents of the company throughout France, and work until the agents are chosen; for it is a matter as delicate as it is difficult to find honest agents—"

"But how, then, did you lose your thirty thousand francs income?" said Oscar to Georges.

"As you lost your arm," dryly replied the former notary's clerk to the former attorney's clerk.

"Then you did some brilliant deed with your fortune?" said Oscar, in a tone of irony mingled with acrimony.

"Zounds! I unfortunately made far too many—deeds; I have some to sell."

They had arrived at Saint-Leu-Taverny, where all the passengers got out while a relay was being made. Oscar admired the vivacity that Pierrotin showed as he unhooked the bar-traces of the coach, while his driver undid the reins of the front horses.

"This poor Pierrotin," he thought, "has remained, like me, not very far advanced in life. Georges has fallen into poverty. All the others, thanks to speculation and talent, have made fortunes—Do we lunch there, Pierrotin?" said Oscar in a loud voice, as he slapped the carrier on the shoulder.

"I am not the driver," said Pierrotin.

"What are you, then?" Colonel Husson asked.

"The contractor," Pierrotin replied.

"Come, don't be angry with old acquaintances," said Oscar, as he pointed to his mother and without abandoning his patronizing tone. "Don't you recognize Madame Clapart?"

It was so much the nobler in Oscar to present his mother to Pierrotin as at that moment Madame Moreau—of the Oise—having got out of the coupé, was looking disdainfully at Oscar and his mother on hearing that name.

"Faith, madame, I would never have recognized you, nor you, sir. It appears to be *baking hot* in Africa?"

The sort of pity with which Pierrotin inspired Oscar, was the last error that vanity made the hero of this scene commit, and he was again punished for it, but rather mildly. This is how:

Two months after his installation at Beaumont-sur-Oise Oscar paid court to Mademoiselle Georgette Pierrotin, whose dowry was a hundred and fifty thousand francs, and he married the daughter of the contractor for the Oise Messageries toward the close of the winter of 1838.

The adventure of the journey to Presles had given discretion to Oscar, the evening with Florentine had strengthened his probity, the hardships of the military career had taught him social hierarchy and obedience to one's lot. Having become wise and capable, he was happy. Before his death, the Comte de Sérizy obtained for Oscar the Pontoise receivership. The protection of Monsieur Moreau—of the Oise,—that of the Comtesse de Sérizy and of the Baron de Canalis, who, sooner or later, will again become a minister, assure a general receivership for Monsieur Husson, in whom the Camusot family now recognize a relative.

Oscar is an ordinary man, mild, unpretentious, modest and always, like his government, observing a golden mean. He excites neither envy nor disdain. He is, in fine, a modern representative of the bourgeois.

Paris, February, 1842.

MADAME FIRMIANI

TO MY DEAR ALEXANDRE DE BERNY

His Old Friend

DE BALZAC

MADAME FIRMIANI

*

Many stories, rich in situations or made dramatic by innumerable throws of chance, carry with them their own artifices and may be told artistically or simply by any lips, without the subject thereby losing the slightest of its beauties; but there are some adventures of human experience to which the accents of the heart alone give life, there are certain anatomical details, so to say, the delicate shades of which reappear only under the most skilful infusions of thought; then, there are portraits that mean a soul and are nothing without the finest traits of their versatile physiognomy; in fine, we meet with those things that we know not how to say or do without certain indescribable unknown harmonies over which presides a day, an hour, a lucky conjunction in the celestial signs, or secret moral predisposition. The telling of this simple story, in which we would like to be able to interest some of those naturally melancholy and dreamy souls that feed on sweet emotions, exacts mysterious revelations like these. If the writer, like a surgeon at the bedside of a dying friend, has been deeply impressed with a sort of respect for the subject that he was

handling, why should not the reader share this inexplicable feeling? Is it a difficult matter to become acquainted with that vague and nervous sorrow that casts gray tints around us, a half-disease whose mild sufferings are sometimes pleasing? If, perchance, you think of persons dear to you whom you have lost; if you are alone, be it at night or evening twilight, follow up the reading of this story; otherwise you should throw the book aside at once. If you have not already buried some good invalid or penniless aunt, you will not understand these pages. To some they will seem impregnated with musk; to others they will appear as colorless, as virtuous as those of Florian can be. In a word, the reader must have known the luxury of tears, have felt the mute sorrow of a memory that lightly passes, loaded with a cherished shadow, but a shadow cast from afar; he ought to have some of those memories that all at once make you regret what the earth has swallowed up of yours and smile with a vanished happiness. Now, believe me that, for all of England's wealth, the author would not extort from poetry a single one of her lies to embellish his narrative. This is a true story, on which you can spend the treasures of your sensibility, if you have any.

At present our language has as many idioms as there are varieties of men in the great French family. And so it is really curious and pleasant to listen to the different meanings or versions given of one and the same thing or one and the same event

by each of the genera that make up the monography of the Parisian, the Parisian being taken to generalize the thesis.

Thus you would have asked of a young member belonging to the genus positive: "Do you know Madame Firmiani?" and this man would have described Madame Firmiani to you by the following inventory: "A large mansion situated in the Rue du Bac, well-furnished salons, fine paintings, fully a hundred thousand francs income, and a husband, formerly receiver-general in the department of Montenotte." Having said so, the positive, a fat and rotund man, nearly always clad in black, makes a slight grimace of satisfaction, raises his lower lip, pursing it in such a way as to cover the upper, and tosses his head as if he were adding: "They are solid folks and people about whom there is nothing to say." Don't ask him anything more! The positives explain everything by figures, by incomes or by solid wealth, a favorite expression of theirs.

Turn to the right, go and ask that other person who belongs to the genus loiterer, and repeat your question to him: "Madame Firmiani?" he says. "Yes, yes, I know her well; I go to her evening parties. She receives on Wednesdays; it is a very honorable house." Already is Madame Firmiani metamorphosed into a house. This house is no longer a pile of stones placed one above the other architecturally; no, this word is, in the loiterer's language, an untranslatable idiom. Here the loiterer, a dry man, with a pleasant smile, saying pretty

nothings, always possessed of more acquired than natural wit, leans towards your ear and with a knowing air says to you: "I have never seen Monsieur Firmiani. His social position consists of managing property in Italy; but Madame Firmiani is a Frenchwoman and spends her revenues like a Parisian. Her tea is excellent! It is one of the houses, now so rare, where one amuses one's self, and where what they give you is exquisite. It is very difficult, moreover, to gain admission into her house. The best society also is found in her salons!" Then the loiterer comments on this last word with a pinch of snuff taken gravely; he supplies his nose with slight taps and seems to say: "I am going to that house, but do not count on me to introduce you there."

To the loiterers, Madame Firmiani keeps a sort of inn without a sign.

"What do you mean to do, then, when you go to Madame Firmiani's? For it is as tiresome there as at court. What is the use of having sense if it is not to shun salons in which, on account of the craze for current poetry, people read the most trifling ballad that has just come out?"

You have questioned one of your friends classed as personal, people who would keep the universe under lock and key and allow nothing to be done in it without their permission. They are unhappy by reason of all the happiness of others, pardon only vices, falls and infirmities, and desire only protégés. Aristocrats from inclination, they turn republicans

out of spite, only to find many inferiors among their equals.

"Oh! Madame Firmiani, my dear boy, is one of those adorable women who serve as an excuse to nature for all the ugly ones that she has created by mistake; she is charming! She is good! I would want to be in power, to become a king, to have millions only for—(*Here three words are whispered*). Do you want me to introduce you to her?"

This young man is of the genus *lycéen*, known for his great boldness among men and his great timidity behind closed doors.

"Madame Firmiani?" exclaims another, as he twirls his cane on itself, "I am going to tell you what I think about her: she is a woman between thirty and thirty-five years old, of faded countenance, fine eyes, flat build, broken contralto voice, elaborate toilet, a little rouge, and charming manners; in fine, my dear boy, the remains of a pretty woman—that, nevertheless, are still worth the trouble of a passion."

This sentence is due to a member of the genus fop who has just had breakfast, no longer weighs his words and is going to get on horseback. At those moments, fops are pitiless.

"There's a gallery of magnificent paintings in her house, go and see them!" another replies to you. "There's nothing so beautiful!"

You address the genus amateur. The individual leaves you to go to Pérignon's or to Tripet's. To him Madame Firmiani is a collection of painted canvases.

A WOMAN.—"Madame Firmiani? I don't want you to go to her house."

This phrase is the richest of translations. Madame Firmiani! dangerous woman! a siren! she dresses well, she has taste, she gives all the women insomnia. The interlocutor belongs to the genus busybody.

A LEGATION ATTACHÉ. — "Madame Firmiani? Isn't she from Antwerp? I saw that very pretty woman ten years ago. She was then at Rome."

The members belonging to the attaché class have a mania for using expressions à la Talleyrand, their wit is often so fine that their views are imperceptible; they resemble those billiard players who miss the balls with wondrous dexterity. These individuals generally talk little; but when they do talk they are concerned only with Spain, Vienna, Italy or St. Petersburg. Names of countries are to them like clock-work: press it, and the machinery will give you all its airs.

"Does not this Madame de Firmiani see much of the Faubourg Saint-Germain?"

This is said by a person who wants to belong to the genus eminent. She gives the *de* to everybody, to the elder Monsieur Dupin, to Monsieur La Fayette; she throws it helter-skelter, she dishonors people by it. She spends her life keeping disturbed about what is *well;* but, as her punishment, she dwells in Le Marais, and her husband has been an attorney, but an attorney in the royal court.

"Madame Firmiani, sir? I don't know her."

This man belongs to the genus duke. He acknowledges acquaintance only with women who have been presented. Excuse him, he was made a duke by Napoléon.

"Madame Firmiani? Is she not a former actress at the Italiens?"

A man of the genus simpleton. Individuals of this class want to have an answer to everything. They calumniate rather than keep silent.

TWO ELDERLY LADIES—*Wives of former magistrates.*

FIRST.—(She has a shell bonnet, her countenance is wrinkled, her nose is pointed, she has a prayer-book in her hand, her voice is shrill.)—"What is this Madame Firmiani in her own name?"

SECOND.—(A small red face resembling an old red apple, a mild voice.)—"A Cadignan, my dear, niece of old Prince de Cadignan and cousin, consequently, of the Duc de Maufrigneuse."

Madame Firmiani is a Cadignan. She might have neither virtue, nor fortune, nor youth, she would still be a Cadignan. A Cadignan is like a prejudice, always rich and alive.

AN ORIGINAL.—"My dear sir, I have never seen socks in her antechamber; you may go to her house without compromising yourself and play there without fear, because, if there are cheats, they are people of quality; consequently they never quarrel there."

AN OLD MAN BELONGING TO THE GENUS OBSERVER.—"You will go to Madame Firmiani's, you

will find, my dear fellow, a pretty woman indolently seated in her chimney-corner. Scarcely will she get up from her armchair, she leaves it only for women or ambassadors, dukes, people of importance. She is very gracious, she is charming, she converses well and wants to converse on everything. There are in her house all the indications of passion, but they give her too many adorers for her to have a favorite. If suspicions hovered only over two or three of those intimate with her, we would know who is her devoted knight; but she is a thoroughly mysterious woman; she is married, and never have we seen her husband; Monsieur Firmiani is an entirely fanciful personage, he is like that third horse that one always pays for in order to go post-haste, but never sees; Madame, if you are to believe artists, is the first contralto in Europe and has not sung three times since she has been in Paris; she receives a great many people and does not go to see anyone."

The observer speaks as a prophet. His words, his anecdotes, his quotations must be accepted as truths, under the penalty of passing for a man devoid of education and expedients. He will laughingly calumniate you in a score of salons, where he is essential as a first piece on the placards, those pieces so often played for the pit and that were formerly successful. The observer is forty years old, never dines at home, declares himself far from dangerous with women; he is powdered, wears a maroon coat, always has a place in several boxes at the *Bouffons;*

he is sometimes confounded with the parasites, but he has filled too high offices to be suspected of being a sponger and owns, moreover, an estate in a department, the name of which has never escaped him.

"Madame Firmiani? But, my dear sir, she was a former mistress of Murat's."

This man belongs to the class of contradictors. People of this sort pick out the *errata* of all accounts, rectify all facts, always bet a hundred to one, are sure of everything. You would catch them the same evening in the very act of ubiquity. They will tell you of having been arrested in Paris at the time of the Mallet conspiracy, forgetting that, half an hour before, they had just crossed the Bérésina. Nearly all the contradictors are chevaliers of the Legion of Honor, talk in a very loud voice, have a receding forehead and play for high stakes.

"Madame Firmiani, a hundred thousand francs income? Are you mad! Verily, there are people who give you a hundred thousand francs income with the liberality of authors, to whom that costs nothing when they give a dowry to their heroines. But Madame Firmiani is a coquette who recently ruined a young man and prevented him from making a very fine marriage. If she were not pretty, she would be penniless."

Oh! you recognize that this man belongs to the genus envious, and we will not outline his slightest feature. The species is as well known as can be that of the domestic *felis*. How are we to explain

the perpetuity of envy. A vice that brings no return!

Fashionable people, *literary* people, *worthy* people, people *of all kinds* were circulating, in the month of January, 1824, so many different opinions about Madame Firmiani that it would be tiresome to note them all here. We have only wanted to state that a man interested in knowing her, without wishing or being able to go to her house, would have had reason to believe her to be either a widow or married, dull or witty, virtuous or immoral, rich or poor, sensitive or soulless, pretty or ugly; there were, in fine, as many Madame Firmianis as classes of society, as factions among Catholics. What a terrifying thought! We are all like lithographic plates of which an infinite number of copies are taken by slander. These proofs resemble the model or differ from it by shades so imperceptible that reputation depends, save the calumnies of our friends and the witticisms of a newspaper, on the balance made by each between truth, which goes halting, and falsehood, to which the Parisian mind gives wings.

Madame Firmiani, like many women filled with nobility and pride who make a sanctuary for themselves of their heart and disdain the world, might have been very unfavorably judged by Monsieur de Bourbonne, an old landlord concerned about her during the winter of that year. Perchance this landlord belonged to the class of provincial planters, men accustomed to take account of everything and to drive bargains with the peasantry. In this

business a man becomes clear-sighted, in spite of himself, as a soldier in the long run contracts courage from routine. This inquiring man, who came from Touraine, and who was scarcely satisfied with the Parisian idioms, was a very honorable gentleman who, as his sole and only heir, rejoiced in a nephew for whom he planted his poplars. This ultra-natural friendship gave occasion to much backbiting, which the members belonging to the various species of Tourainer quite wittily formulated; but it is useless to relate them, they would pale before the backbitings of Paris. When a man can think of his heir without displeasure as every day he sees fine rows of poplars blooming, affection increases every time he strikes his spade at the foot of the trees. Though this phenomenon of sensibility be far from common, it is still met with in Touraine.

This beloved nephew, whose name was Octave de Camps, was descended from the famous Abbé de Camps, so well known to bibliophiles, or to savants, which is not the same thing. Provincial folk have the bad habit of branding, with a sort of decent reprobation, young men who sell their inheritances. This Gothic prejudice injures stock-jobbing, which so far the Government has encouraged from necessity. Without consulting his uncle, Octave had unexpectedly disposed of an estate in favor of the black band. The château of Villaines would have been demolished but for the proposals that the old uncle had made to the representatives of the auction firm. To intensify the testator's wrath, a friend of

Octave's, a distant relative, one of those cousins of small means and great shrewdness, of whom prudent folk of their province are forced to say: "I wouldn't want to have a lawsuit with him!" had come, perchance, to Monsieur de Bourbonne's and had informed him of his nephew's ruin. Monsieur Octave de Camps, after having squandered his fortune on a certain Madame Firmiani, was reduced to turning tutor of mathematics, while waiting for the inheritance from his uncle, to whom he dared not come and acknowledge his faults. This remote cousin, a sort of Charles Moor, had not been ashamed to bring this fatal news to the old rustic just as he was digesting, in front of his spacious fire-place, a copious provincial dinner. But heirs do not get around an uncle as easily as they would like. Thanks to this stubbornness, the latter, who refused to put faith in the remote cousin, came off victorious over the indigestion caused by his nephew's biography. Certain blows strike the heart, others the head; the blow aimed by the remote cousin fell on the entrails and had little effect, because the good man had an excellent stomach. Like a true disciple of St. Thomas, Monsieur de Bourbonne came to Paris, unknown to Octave, and wanted to get information about his heir's downfall. The old gentleman, who had relations with the Faubourg Saint-Germain through the Listomères, the Lenoncourts and the Vandenesses, heard so much backbiting, truth and falsehood about Madame Firmiani, that he resolved to get introduced to her under the name of Monsieur

de Rouxellay, the name of his estate. The discreet old man had taken care, for the purpose of coming to study Octave's supposed mistress, to choose an evening on which he knew him to be engaged in finishing a work for which a high price had been offered; for Madame Firmiani's friend was always received at her house, a circumstance that no one could explain. As regards Octave's ruin, it was unfortunately not a fable.

Monsieur de Rouxellay bore no resemblance to an uncle from the *Gymnase.* A former musketeer, a man of exalted company who had formerly had love tilts, he knew how to present himself courteously, remembered the polite manners of the olden time, spoke gracious words and understood nearly all of the Charter. Though he loved the Bourbons with noble frankness, though he believed in God as gentlemen believe in Him, and though he read only *La Quotidienne,* he was not as ridiculous as the Liberals of his department wanted him to be. He could keep his place with court folks, provided they did not speak to him of *Mosè,* or of the drama, or of romance, or of local color, or of railroads. He had stuck to Monsieur de Voltaire, to the Comte de Buffon, to Peyronnet and to the Chevalier Gluck, the musician of the queen's corner.

"Madame," he said to the Marquise de Listomère, to whom he offered his arm on entering Madame Firmiani's, "if this woman is my nephew's mistress, I will complain of it. How can she live in the midst of luxury, while knowing that he is in a

garret? She has no soul, then? Octave is a fool for having invested the price of the Villaines estate in the heart of one—"

Monsieur de Bourbonne belonged to the genus fossil, and knew only the language of the olden time.

"But suppose he had lost it gambling?"

"Well! madame, at least he would have had the pleasure of gambling."

"You think, then, that he has had no pleasure? Come and see Madame Firmiani."

The old uncle's finest memories paled at the sight of his nephew's supposed mistress. His wrath vanished in a gracious phrase that was extorted from him on seeing Madame Firmiani. By one of those chances that happen only to pretty women, it was a moment when all the phases of her beauty shone with a special splendor, due, perhaps, to the light of the candles, to an admirably simple toilet, to an indescribable reflection of the elegance amid which she lived. One must have studied the petty revolutions of an evening in a Paris salon to appreciate the imperceptible shades that can color a woman's countenance and change it. It is a moment when, satisfied with her decking, or finding herself witty, happy at being admired, on seeing herself the queen of a salon full of remarkable men who smile on her, a Parisian woman is conscious of her beauty, of her grace; she is then embellished with all the looks that she receives and that animate her, but whose mute homages are carried by shrewd looks to the

well-beloved. At that moment a woman is, as it were, invested with a supernatural power and becomes a magician, a coquette without her knowing it; she involuntarily inspires the love that turns her head in secret, she has smiles and looks that fascinate. If this condition, which comes from the soul, makes even the homely attractive, with what splendor does it not clothe a woman who is naturally elegant, has traits of distinction, is fair and fresh, has bright eyes, and especially is dressed with a taste admired by artists and even her most cruel rivals!

Have you been made happy by meeting some person whose harmonious voice impressed upon her speech a charm equally displayed by her mannerisms, who knows when to speak and when to be silent, who concerns herself about you with delicacy, whose words are happily chosen, or whose language is pure? Her raillery endears and her criticism does not offend; she does not discuss any more than she disputes, but she is pleased to direct a discussion, and stops it at the right time. Her bearing is affable and smiling, there is nothing forced in her politeness, her attentions are not servile; respect in her is scarcely marked, it is reduced to a soft shadow; she never tires you, and leaves you satisfied with her and with yourself. You find her good graces impressed on the things by which she is surrounded. In her house everything flatters the eye, and there you breathe, as it were, the air of a fatherland. That woman is natural. In her never is there effort, there is nothing about her that is put

on, her feelings are simply expressed, because they are true. Being frank, she knows how to avoid offense; she takes men as God has made them, regretting that there are vicious people, overlooking shortcomings and follies, taking account of all ages, and being irritated at nothing, because she has tact to foresee everything. At the same time tender and gay, she obliges before consoling. You love her so much that, if this angel makes a mistake, you feel yourself ready to justify her. You then know Madame Firmiani.

When old Bourbonne had chatted for a quarter of an hour with this woman, seated beside her, his nephew was absolved. He felt that, whether false or true, Octave's intrigues with Madame Firmiani no doubt concealed some mystery. Returning to the illusions that gild the early days of our youth and judging of Madame Firmiani's heart by her beauty, the old gentleman thought that a woman so penetrated by her dignity as she appeared to be, was incapable of a bad act. Her black eyes bespoke so much internal calm, the lines of her face were so noble, the outlines so pure, and the passion of which people accused her seemed to weigh so lightly on her heart, that the old man said to himself, as he admired all the promises made to love and virtue by this adorable countenance:

"My nephew may have been guilty of some folly."

Madame Firmiani confessed to being twenty-five years old. But those of the genus positive proved

that, having married in 1813, at the age of sixteen, she must have been at least twenty-eight in 1825. Yet the same people asserted also, that at no period of her life had she been so desirable or so thoroughly a woman. She was childless, and never had had any children; the problematical Firmiani, a very respectable man of forty in 1813, had, it was said, been able to give her only his name and his fortune. Madame Firmiani was, then, approaching the age when the Parisian woman best understands a passion and desires it perhaps innocently in her forlorn hours; she had acquired all that the world sells, all that it lends, all that it gives; legation attachés pretended that she was ignorant of nothing, contradictors that she could still learn many things, observers found her hands very white, her foot pretty, her walk a little too undulating; but individuals of all the genera envied or disputed Octave's happiness, while agreeing that she was the most aristocratically beautiful woman in all Paris. Still young, rich, a perfect musician, witty, delicate, received, in memory of the Cadignans, to whom she belonged through her mother, at the Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry's, the oracle of the noble faubourg, loved by her rivals, her cousin the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, the Marquise d'Espard and Madame de Macumer, she flattered all the vanities that feed or that excite love. And so she was desired by too many people not to be a victim of the elegant backbiting of Paris and of the ravenous calumnies that are so wittily retailed behind the fan or in the

asides. The remarks with which this history begins were necessary, then, so as to put the true Firmiani in contrast with the Firmiani of the world. If some women pardoned her her happiness, others did not forgive her for her propriety; now, nothing is so terrible, especially in Paris, as groundless suspicions—it is impossible to destroy them. This sketch of a figure, admirable for its naturalness, will give but a faint picture; the pencil of Ingres alone could represent the proud brow, the profusion of hair, the majestic look, all the thoughts that were betrayed by the special colors of the complexion. There was everything in that woman; poets might see in her at one and the same time Jeanne Darc or Agnès Sorel; but there was in her also the unknown woman, the soul hidden under this deceiving envelope, the soul of Eve, the riches of evil and the treasures of good, error and resignation, crime and devotedness, Doña Julia and Haidee of Lord Byron's *Don Juan.*

The former musketeer quite impertinently remained the last in Madame Firmiani's parlor; she found him peacefully seated in an armchair, and posing in front of her with the importunity of a fly that one must kill to get rid of it. The clock marked two in the morning.

"Madame," said the old gentlman, just as Madame Firmiani arose, hoping to make her guest understand that it was her good pleasure that he should leave; "madame, I am Monsieur Octave de Camps' uncle."

Madame Firmiani at once sat down again and showed her emotion. In spite of his keenness, the poplar planter did not observe whether she grew pale and blushed from shame or from pleasure. There are pleasures that do not go without a little shy modesty, delightful emotions that the chastest heart would always veil. The more tender a woman is, the more she wishes to conceal the delights of her soul. Many women, incomprehensible in their divine caprices, often wish to hear everybody pronounce a name that sometimes they would desire to bury in their hearts. Old Bourbonne did not quite thus interpret Madame Firmiani's trouble; but excuse him, the countryman was distrustful.

"Well, sir?" said Madame Firmiani to him as she cast on him one of those lucid and clear looks in which we men can never see anything, because they interrogate us a little too much.

"Well, madame," the gentleman continued, "do you know what people have told me, yes, me, away out in my province? That my nephew has ruined himself on your account, and the wretch is in a garret, while you live here in gold and silk. You will pardon me for my rustic frankness, for it is perhaps very useful for you to be informed of the calumnies—"

"Stop, sir," said Madame Firmiani, interrupting the gentleman with an imperative gesture, "I know all that. You are too polite to continue conversing on this subject after I shall have entreated you to

abandon it. You are too gallant—in the old acceptation of the word," she added, as she gave a slight tone of irony to her words—"not to recognize that you have no right to question me. In fine, it is ridiculous for me to justify myself. I hope that you will have a good enough opinion of my character to believe in the profound contempt with which money inspires me, though without means of any kind I married a man who was immensely rich. I do not know whether your nephew is rich or poor. If I have received him, if I do receive him, I regard him as worthy of being among and with my friends. All my friends, sir, respect one another; they know that I am not so philosophical as to see people when I do not esteem them; perhaps I am lacking in charity; but my guardian angel has kept me until now in a state of profound aversion to tattling and improbity."

Though there was a slight quiver in the tone of her voice during the opening phrases of this reply, its closing words were spoken by Madame Firmiani with the coolness of Célimène taunting the Misanthrope.

"Madame," the count continued, in a voice filled with emotion, "I am an old man, I am almost Octave's father, I ask of you in advance, then, the humblest of pardons for the only question that I am going to be bold enough to put to you, and I give you my word as an honorable gentleman that your answer will lie there," he said, as he put his hand on his heart with a truly religious gesture. "Is scandal correct; do you love Octave?"

"Sir," she said, "any one else I would answer only with a look; but you, and because you are almost Monsieur de Camps' father, I will ask what you would think of a woman if, to your question, she said: *Yes.* To acknowledge one's love to him whom we love, when he loves us—there—well; when we are certain of being always loved, believe me, sir, it is an effort to us and to him a recompense; but to any one else!—"

Madame Firmiani did not finish, she arose, saluted the good man and disappeared in her rooms, all the doors of which, successively opened and shut, spoke a language in the poplar planter's ears.

"Ah! bless me!" said the old man to himself, "what a woman! She is either a downright gossiping hypocrite or an angel."

And he reached his hired carriage, the horses of which were beating time with their hoofs on the pavement of the silent court. The coachman was asleep, after having a hundred times cursed his customer.

Next morning, about eight o'clock, the old gentleman ascended the stairway of a house situated in the Rue de l'Observance, where Octave de Camps dwelt. If there was a surprised man in the world, it certainly was the young professor when he saw his uncle. The key was in the door, Octave's lamp was still burning, he had been up all night.

"Monsieur Funny Man," said Monsieur de Bourbonne as he sat down in an armchair, "since when have people been laughing—chaste style—at uncles

that have an income of twenty-six thousand francs from good estates in Touraine, when one is their sole heir? Do you know that in former days we respected such relations? Let us see; have you any reproaches to make to me? Have I played my part of uncle badly? Have I asked you for respect? Have I refused you money? Have I shut the door in your face, pretending that you came to see how I was behaving myself? Have you not the most accommodating uncle, the least domineering that there is in France? I do not say in Europe, that would be too pretentious. You write to me or you do not write to me; I live on sworn affection, and take care of the prettiest estate in the country for you, a property that is the envy of the whole department; but I want to leave it to you, however, as late as possible. Is not this fancy extremely excusable? And the gentleman sells his property, lodges like a lackey, and no longer has either friends or retinue!"

"Uncle—"

"It is not a question of uncle, but of nephew. I am entitled to your confidence; so confess at once, it is easier. I know that from experience. Have you gambled; have you lost at the Bourse? If so, say to me: 'Uncle, I am a wretch!' and I will embrace you. But if you tell me a lie bigger than those I was guilty of at your age, I will sell my property, I will turn it into a life annuity and will resume the bad habits of my youth, if it be still possible."

"Uncle—"

"I saw your Madame Firmiani yesterday," said the uncle, as he kissed the ends of his fingers which he gathered into a bunch. "She is charming," he added. "You enjoy the approbation and the privilege of the king, and the consent of your uncle, if that can give you any pleasure. As for the sanction of the Church, it is useless, I believe, the sacraments are no doubt too dear! Come, speak, is it for her you have ruined yourself?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Ah! the jade; I would have bet on it. In my time women of court went more shrewdly about ruining a man than can your courtesans of to-day. In her I recognized the past age rejuvenated."

"Uncle," Octave continued, in a tone at the same time quite sad and mild, "you are mistaken. Madame Firmiani merits your esteem and all the adorations of her admirers."

"Poor youth, then, will always be the same," said Monsieur de Bourbonne. "Come, go your way, weary me with old stories. Yet you ought to know that I am not of yesterday in gallantry."

"My good uncle, here is a letter that will tell you all," Octave replied, as he drew out an elegant portfolio, no doubt given by *her;* "when you will have read it, I will complete the information I have to give you, and you will know a Madame Firmiani unknown to the world."

"I have not my spectacles," the uncle said; "read it for me."

Octave began thus: "My beloved husband—"

"You are, then, closely connected with that woman?"

"Yes, certainly, uncle."

"And you are not compromised?"

"Compromised!" Octave repeated, quite astonished. "We were married at Gretna Green."

"Well, well," Monsieur de Bourbonne continued; "why, then, do you eat forty-sou dinners?"

"Let me continue."

"That is only fair, I am listening."

Octave continued the letter, and did not read certain portions of it without deep emotion:

"My beloved husband, you have asked me the reason for my sadness; has it passed, then, from my soul to my countenance, or have you only guessed it? And why should it not be thus? We are so closely united in heart! Moreover, I do not know how to lie, and indeed, is that a misfortune? One of the conditions of the woman who is loved is to be ever caressing and gay. Perhaps I should deceive you; but I would not desire to do so, although it were a question of increasing or preserving the happiness that you give me, that you lavish on me, with which you overwhelm me. Oh! my dear, how much gratitude my love implies! And so I want to love you always, unboundedly. Yes, I want always to be proud of you. Our glory, that is, our own, is all in him whom we love. Esteem, consideration, honor—does not he enjoy all of these who has taken all? Well, my angel has failed. Yes, my dear, your last confidence has dulled my past felicity. Since that moment I find myself humiliated in you; in you whom I regarded as the purest of men, as you are the most loving and most tender of them. One must have a great deal of confidence in your heart, which is still that of a child, to make to you an avowal that is horribly expensive to me. You know, poor angel, how your father

stole his means, and you keep it! And you told me of that proctor's high-handed doings in a room full of mute witnesses of our love, and you are a gentleman, and you believe yourself noble, and you have me, and you are twenty-two! What monstrosities! I have sought excuses for you, I have attributed your apathy to your giddy youth. I know that there is a great deal of the child in you. Perhaps you have not yet thought very seriously of what fortune or probity is. Oh! how uneasy your laugh has made me feel! Think, then, that there is a ruined family, ever in tears, that there are young persons who perhaps curse you every day, an old man who says to himself each evening: 'I would not be in want of bread if Monsieur de Camps' father had not been a dishonest man.'"

"What!" Monsieur de Bourbonne exclaimed, interrupting, "you were so simple as to tell that woman of your father's affair with the Bourgneufs? Women know much more about eating up a fortune than making one."

"They have an understanding of honesty. But let me continue, uncle:

"Octave, no power in the world has authority to change the language of honor. Retire into your conscience, and ask it by what word it would call the act to which you owe your gold."

And the nephew looked at the uncle, who drooped his head.

"I will not tell all the thoughts that besiege me, they may all be reduced to a single one, and here it is: I cannot esteem a man who knowingly sullies himself for a sum of money, however much it may be. A hundred sous, stolen at gambling, or six times a hundred thousand francs, due to a legal

deception, equally dishonor a man. I mean to tell you all: I regard myself as smirched by a love that but lately constituted all my happiness. There arises from the bottom of my soul a voice that my tenderness cannot stifle. Ah! I have wept for having more conscience than love. You might commit a crime; I would conceal you in my bosom from human justice, if I could; but my devotedness would go only so far. Love, my angel, is in a woman the most unlimited confidence, united with an indescribable need to venerate, to adore the being to whom she belongs. I have never thought of love except as a fire in which even the noblest sentiments are purified, a fire that develops them all. I have only one thing more to say to you: Come to me poor, my love will be redoubled, if that can be; if not, give me up. If I never see you again, I know what remains for me to do. Now I do not mean, be it clearly understood, that you make restitution because I advise you to do so. Consult your conscience thoroughly. It is not necessary that this act of justice be a sacrifice made to love. I am your wife, and not your mistress; it is less a matter of pleasing me than of inspiring in me the most profound esteem for you. If I am deceived, if you have imperfectly explained to me your father's conduct; in fine, if you have the least ground for thinking your means lawfully acquired,—oh! I would like to persuade myself that you merit no blame!—decide as the voice of your conscience tells you, act clearly of your own accord. A man who loves sincerely as you love me, has too much respect for all the holy trust that his wife puts in him, to be dishonest. I now reproach myself for all that I have just written. A word was sufficient, perhaps, and my preaching instinct has carried me on. And so I would like to be scolded, not too much, but a little. My dear, between ourselves, are not you the power? you alone ought to realize your faults. Well, my master, will you say that I understand nothing of political discussion?"

"Well, uncle," said Octave, whose eyes were filled with tears.

"But I see that there is more writing; finish it, then."

"Oh! there's nothing now left but those things that should be read only by a lover."

"Good," said the old man, "good, my boy. I have had many affairs of gallantry, but I entreat you to believe that I too have loved, *et ego in Arcadia.* Only I do not understand why you give lessons in mathematics."

"My dear uncle, I am your nephew; does not the reading of this letter tell you, in a very few words, that I had entrenched somewhat on the capital left by my father? After having read this letter quite a revolution took place in me, and on the spot I paid the arrears of my remorse. I will never be able to picture to you the state in which I was. As I drove my cab through the Bois a voice called out to me: 'Is that horse yours?' While eating I said to myself, 'Isn't it a stolen dinner?' I was ashamed of myself. The more newly-born my probity, the more ardent it was. I first ran to Madame Firmiani's. My God! uncle, that day I had heart pleasures, soul enjoyments that were worth millions. With her I went over the account of what I owed to the Bourgneuf family, and I obligated myself to pay them three per cent interest, against Madame Firmiani's advice; but all I was worth would not suffice to meet that sum. Both of us were then enough in love with each other, near enough to being husband and wife, for her to offer and for me to accept her savings—"

"What! besides her virtues this woman saves something!" the uncle exclaimed.

"Do not make fun of her, uncle. Her position obliges her to economize in many ways. In 1820 her husband set out for Greece, where he died three years ago; until this day it has been impossible to get legal proof of his death, and to get possession of the will that he must have made in his wife's favor, an important document that was taken, lost or went astray in a country where legal papers are not kept as they are in France, and where there is no consul. Not knowing but that one day she will be obliged to reckon with troublesome heirs, she is obliged to keep everything in the best of order, for she wants to be able to leave her wealth as Chateaubriand has just left the ministry. Now, I want to acquire a fortune that will be *my own*, so as to restore her wealth to my wife, in case she were ruined."

"And you did not tell me of that, and you did not come to me.—Oh! my nephew, be convinced, then, that I love you enough to pay your honest debts, the debts of a gentleman. I am an uncle to the end, I will vindicate myself."

"Uncle, I know of your vindications, but let me get rich by my own industry. If you want to oblige me, give me merely an annual allowance of a thousand crowns until I need capital for some undertaking. Hold; at this moment I am so happy that my only concern is to live. I give lessons so as not to be a burden on anyone. Ah! if you knew with what pleasure I made restitution! Having

taken certain steps, I at last found the Bourgneufs, in misery and without any means. That family was at Saint-Germain, in a wretched dwelling. The aged father was carrying on a lottery office, his two daughters were doing housework and attending to the correspondence. The mother was nearly always sick. The two daughters are charming, but they have severely learned the little value that the world sets on beauty without means. What a picture I went to look for there! If I entered as the accomplice of a crime, I left as an honest man and I cleansed the memory of my father. Oh! uncle, I do not judge him, there is a fascination in lawsuits, a passion, that may sometimes mislead the most honest man in the world. Lawyers know how to give the appearance of legality to the most absurd pretensions, law has syllogisms that humor the errors of conscience, and judges have the right to err. My adventure was a real drama. To have been in the place of Providence, to have realized one of those useless wishes 'If an income of twenty thousand francs should fall to us from the sky!' that wish which we all entertain with a smile; to get a sublime look of gratitude, astonishment and admiration to follow a look full of imprecation; to bring opulence to a family assembled of an evening around the light of a mean lamp, before a peat fire. No, words fail in the presence of such a scene. My extreme justice to them seemed unjust. In fine, if there be a Paradise, my father ought to be happy there now. As for me, I am loved as no man has

been. Madame Firmiani has given me more than happiness, she has endowed me with a delicacy that I perhaps lacked. And so I call her *my dear conscience*, one of those love expressions that answer certain secret harmonies of the heart. Probity brings its reward. I hope soon to be rich by my own efforts; I am trying at this moment to solve an industrial problem, and if I succeed, I will make millions."

"Oh! my boy, you have your mother's soul," said the old man, as he scarcely restrained the tears that moistened his eyes as he thought of his sister.

At that moment, despite the distance that separated Octave's room from the ground, the young man and his uncle heard the noise made by the arrival of a carriage.

"It is she!" he said. "I know her horses by the way they stop."

In fact, Madame Firmiani was not slow in making her appearance.

"Ah!" she said, giving indication of ill humor on seeing Monsieur de Bourbonne. "But our uncle is not one too many," she continued, as she let a smile escape her. "I wanted to kneel humbly before my husband and entreat him to accept my fortune. The Austrian embassy has just sent me a deed that proves Firmiani's death. The document, drawn up by the care of the Austrian internuncio at Constantinople, is entirely regular, and the will that the valet de chambre kept to give to me is added thereto. Octave, you may accept all. Go, you are richer

than I; you have there treasures to which God alone can add," she continued, as she patted her husband on the heart.

Then, unable to contain her happiness, she buried her head in Octave's bosom.

"My niece, of old we made love, to-day you love," said the uncle. "You are all that is good and beautiful in humanity; for you are never guilty of your faults, they always come from us."

Paris, February, 1831.

THE MESSAGE

THE COUNTESS AT MY BED

At a late hour of the night I was awakened by the sharp rattling made by the rings of my curtains violently drawn on their iron rod. I saw the countess seated on the foot of my bed. Her countenance received all the light from a lamp placed on my table.

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TO THE MARQUIS DAMASO PARETO

THE MESSAGE

*

I have always desired to relate a simple story, at the telling of which a young man and his mistress were seized with fright and took refuge in each other's hearts, like two children who hug each other on meeting a serpent at the edge of a wood. At the risk of belittling interest in my narrative or of passing for a ninny, I begin by telling you the purpose of my story. I played a part in this almost common drama; if it does not interest you, it will be my fault as well as that of historic truth. Many true things are supremely tiresome. And so it is half of talent to select from the true what may become poetic.

In 1819 I went from Paris to Moulins. The condition of my purse obliged me to travel on the outside of the stage-coach. The English, you know, regard the seats situated in that aërial part of the coach as the best. During the first few leagues of the journey I found a thousand excellent reasons to justify our neighbors' opinion. A young man, who seemed to me to be a little richer than I was, from choice mounted near me, on the bench. He received my arguments with inoffensive smiles.

Ere long a certain conformity of age and thought, our mutual love for the open air, for the fine country views that spread before us as the heavy coach advanced, then a certain indescribable magnetic attraction, impossible to explain, caused to arise between us that sort of momentary intimacy to which passengers give themselves up with so much the more complaisance that this ephemeral feeling seems bound to come to an end at once and to in no way create involvements for the future. We had not gone thirty leagues when we had spoken of women and love. With all the oratorical precautions desired on such an occasion, naturally the subject of mistresses was discussed. Both of us young, neither of us had yet got beyond the *woman of a certain age*, that is, the woman between thirty-five and forty. Oh! a poet who might have heard us, from Montargis to I do not recall what stage, would have gathered up rather heated expressions, enrapturing portraits and very soft confidences! Our modest fears, our silent interjections and our still blushing looks were marked with an eloquence, the unaffected charm of which has never come back to me. No doubt one must remain young in order to understand youth. So we understood each other marvelously well on all the essential points of that passion. And, in the first place, we had begun to lay it down in fact and in principle that there was nothing more foolish in the world than a certificate of birth; that women of forty were younger than certain women of twenty, and, that, in fine, women

are only as old as they look. This system set no limit to love, and, in good faith, we swam in an unbounded ocean. In fine, after having made our mistresses young, charming, devoted, countesses, noted for taste, witty, shrewd; after having given them pretty feet, a skin like satin and even sweetly perfumed, we acknowledged, he, that *Madame Such-a-one* was thirty-eight, and I, on my part, that I adored a woman of forty. On that head, delivered, both of us, from a sort of vague fear, we resumed our confidences the more easily on finding ourselves brothers in love. Then it was as to which of us two would display most feeling. One had on one occasion gone two hundred leagues to see his mistress for an hour. The other had risked being taken for a wolf and shot in a park, in order to be at a nocturnal meeting-place. In fine, all our follies! If there is pleasure in recalling past dangers, is there not also much delight in remembering vanished pleasures? it is enjoying twice. Perils, great and little happinesses, we told each other all, even the pleasantries. My friend's countess had smoked a cigar to please him; mine made my chocolate for me and did not let a day pass without writing to me or seeing me; his had come to stay at his house for three days at the risk of ruining her reputation; mine had done still better, or worse if you will. Our husbands adored our countesses, moreover; they lived as slaves under the charm possessed by all loving women; and, more silly than the law allows, they put us in only just so much

peril as was necessary to increase our pleasure. Oh! how speedily the wind carried off our words and our sweet laughter!

On approaching Pouilly I very closely examined the person of my new friend. Certainly I very easily believed that he must have been most seriously loved. Picture to yourself a young man of medium height, but very well proportioned, and having a happy countenance full of expression. His hair was black and his eyes blue; his lips were delicately rose-tinted; his teeth, white and well set; a genteel paleness also adorned the fine lines of his face, then a faint bistre circle was drawn around his eyes, as if he had been convalescent. Add to this that he had white hands, well shaped, and cared for as ought to be those of a pretty woman, that he appeared to be well educated, was witty, and you will have no difficulty in conceding to me that my companion might have done honor to a countess. In fine, more than one young woman would have desired him for a husband, for he was a viscount, and had an income of about between twelve and fifteen thousand francs, *without counting expectations.*

When within a league of Pouilly the stage was upset. My unfortunate comrade thought he would, in order to save himself, jump on to the edge of a field freshly ploughed, instead of holding on to the bench, as I did, and follow the motion of the stage. He either made his jump poorly or slipped, I do not know how the accident happened, but he was

crushed by the coach, which fell on him. We carried him to a peasant's house. Between the groans wrung from him by excruciating pains, he was able to bequeath to me the carrying out of one of those anxieties to which the last wishes of a dying man give the character of sadness. In the midst of his agony the poor youth was tormented, with all the candor to which one is often a victim at his age, at the grief that his mistress would feel, were she to learn suddenly of his death through a newspaper. He entreated me to go myself to break the news to her. Then he made me look for a key hanging to a ribbon that he wore crosswise on his breast. I found it half buried in his flesh. The dying man did not utter the slightest complaint when I drew it out, as delicately as I could, from the wound that it had inflicted. Just as he finished giving me all the instructions necessary for getting to his home, at La Charité-sur-Loire, the love-letters that his mistress had written to him, and that he entreated me to give back to her, he lost the power of speech in the middle of a phrase; but his last gesture gave me to understand that the fatal key would be a pledge of my mission to his mother. Afflicted at not being able to formulate a single word of thanks, for he had no doubt of my zeal, he looked at me with a suppliant eye for a moment, bade me adieu by saluting me with a motion of his eyebrows, then he leaned back his head, and died. His death was the only fatal accident caused by the upsetting of the coach.

"And still it was somewhat his own fault," the driver said to me.

At La Charité I carried out this poor passenger's verbal will. His mother was absent; that was a sort of happiness to me. Nevertheless, I had to stand the grief of an old servant, who staggered when I related her young master's death to her; she fell half dead on a chair as she saw that key still stained with blood; but, as I was entirely concerned with a higher suffering, that of a woman from whom fate snatched her last love, I left the old housemaid pursuing the course of her personifications, and I carried off the precious correspondence, carefully sealed by my friend of a day.

The château in which the countess dwelt was situated eight leagues from Moulins, and to reach it still required going some leagues across country. It was, then, rather difficult for me to attend to my errand. By a combination of circumstances needless to explain, I had only the money necessary to reach Moulins. With the enthusiasm of youth, however, I resolved to make the journey on foot, and to go fast enough to be ahead of the report of bad news, which travels so rapidly. I inquired for the shortest way, and I went by the paths of Le Bourbonnais, carrying, so to say, a corpse on my shoulders. In proportion as I advanced towards the château of Montpersan, I was more and more frightened at the strange pilgrimage that I had undertaken. My imagination invented a thousand romantic fancies. I pictured to myself all the ways

in which I could find the Comtesse de Montpersan, or, in obedience to the poetic form of romances, the *Juliette* so loved by the young passenger. I forged witty replies to questions that I supposed would have to be asked of me. At each turn in the wood, at each cut in the road, it was a repetition of the scene of Sosie and his lantern, in which he gives an account of the battle. To the dishonor of my heart, I thought at first only of my bearing, of my wit, of the skill that I wanted to display; but when I was in the country, a sinister reflection crossed my mind as a thunderbolt furrows and tears a veil of gray clouds. What terrible news to a woman who, entirely concerned at that moment with her young friend, was hoping from hour to hour for nameless joys, after having taken the greatest trouble to bring him legally to her house! In fine, there was still a cruel charity in being the messenger of death. And so I hastened my pace, bedraggling and bemiring myself on the Le Bourbonnais roads. I soon reached a great avenue of chestnut trees, at the end of which the pile of the Montpersan château was outlined against the sky, like a brown cloud with a bright and fantastic background. On arriving at the château gate, I found it wide open. This unforeseen circumstance destroyed my plans and my suppositions. Yet I entered boldly, and at once I had alongside of me two dogs that barked like real country dogs. On hearing that noise a stout servant girl ran, and when I had told her that I wanted to speak to the

countess, with a wave of her hand she pointed to the great spaces of an English park that wound around the château, and answered:

"Madame is over there—"

"Thanks!" I said to her in an ironical tone.

Her *over there* might keep me wandering through the park for two hours.

A pretty little girl with hair in ringlets, with a rose-colored girdle, a white dress and a plaited apron, arrived in the meantime, and heard or guessed at the question and answer. On seeing me she disappeared, calling in a low, fine accent:

"Mother, here is a gentleman who wants to speak to you."

And I had to follow, through the windings of the alleys, the jumps and bounds of the white apron, which, like a will-o'-the-wisp, showed me the way that the little girl took.

The whole story must be told: At the last bush of the avenue I had raised my collar, brushed my mean hat and my trousers with the cuffs of my coat, my coat with its sleeves, and the sleeves with each other; then I had carefully buttoned it so as to show the inside of the lapels, always a little newer-looking than is the rest; in fine, I had let down my trousers over my boots, which I had artistically rubbed in the grass. Thanks to this Gascon toilet, I hoped not to be taken for the sub-prefecture roundsman; but when to-day I go back in thought to that hour of my youth, I sometimes laugh to myself.

All of a sudden, just as I was adjusting my bearing, at the turn of a green winding, in the midst of a myriad of flowers lit up by a warm ray of the sun, I saw Juliette and her husband. The pretty little girl was holding her mother's hand, and it was easy to notice that the countess had hastened her steps as she heard her child's ambiguous phrase. Astonished at the appearance of an unknown person who saluted her in a rather awkward manner, she stopped, gave me a rather coldly polite look and an adorable wry face which to me revealed all her deluded hopes. I tried to call up, but in vain, some of my fine phrases that I had prepared so laboriously. During that moment of mutual hesitation the husband might also enter into the scene. Myriads of thoughts passed through my brain. Out of politeness, I uttered a few insignificant words, asking whether the persons present were really indeed the Comte and Comtesse de Montpersan. These trifling remarks enabled me to judge with a single glance and to analyze, with a perspicacity rare at my age, the two spouses whose solitude was going to be so rudely disturbed. The husband seemed to be the type of those gentlemen who are at present the finest ornament of the provinces. He wore large shoes with heavy soles: I mention them first because they struck me even more keenly than his faded black coat, his well-worn trousers, his loose cravat and his wilted shirt-collar. In that man there was a little of the magistrate, much more of the prefecture councillor,

all the importance of a mayor of a canton whom nothing resists, and the sourness of an eligible candidate who had been periodically rejected since 1816; an incredible mixture of rural common sense and dullness; no manners, but the haughtiness of wealth; much submission to his wife, but thinking himself the master, and ready to wince in little things without having any care about important matters; moreover, a withered face, very much wrinkled and tanned; some gray hairs, long and straight—such was the man. But the countess! ah! what a keen and striking contrast she presented to her husband! She was a small woman of refined and graceful form, having a charming shape; dainty and so delicate, you would be afraid of breaking her bones by touching her. She wore a white muslin dress; she had on her head a pretty bonnet with rose ribbons, a rose-colored girdle, guimpe so ravishingly filled by her shoulders and by the most graceful contours, at sight of which there sprang from the bottom of the heart an irresistible desire to possess them. Her eyes were bright, black and expressive, her motion easy, her foot charming. An old gallant would not have thought her more than thirty years old, so much youth was there in her brow and in the most fragile details of her head. As for character, she seemed to me to pertain at one and the same time to the Comtesse de Lignolles and the Marquise de B—, two types of woman always fresh in a young man's memory, when he has read Louvet's romance. I suddenly penetrated into all

the secrets of that household, and formed a diplomatic resolve worthy of an old ambassador. It was, perhaps, the only time in my life that I had tact and that I understood wherein consisted address on the part of courtiers and people of the world.

Since those care-free days I have had too many battles to fight to have had time to distil the slightest acts of life and to do anything but by carrying out the cadences of etiquette and good form that dry up the most generous emotions.

"Monsieur le Comte, I would like to speak with you in private," I said in a mysterious tone and receding a few steps.

He followed me. Juliette left us alone, and went off carelessly like a woman certain of learning her husband's secrets, at the moment when she will desire to know them. I briefly told the count of my traveling companion's death. The effect that this news had on him proved to me that he had a rather warm affection for his young colleague, and this discovery gave me boldness to answer thus in the dialogue that followed between the two of us.

"My wife will be in despair," he exclaimed, "and I will be obliged to take considerable precaution in informing her of this unfortunate event."

"Sir, in addressing you in the first place," I said to him, "I have performed my duty. I did not wish to discharge this mission entrusted to me by an unknown man to the countess without notifying you; but he confided to me a sort of honorable trust, a secret which I have not the power to give away.

In accordance with the lofty idea that he gave me of your character, I thought that you would not be opposed to my carrying out his last wishes. The countess will be free to break the silence that has been imposed on me."

On hearing himself praised, the gentleman balanced his head very pleasantly. He answered me with a rather complicated compliment, and ended by leaving the field free to me. We retraced our steps. At that moment the bell summoned to dinner; I was invited to partake of it. Finding us grave and silent, Juliette examined us furtively. Strangely surprised at seeing her husband seizing a frivolous pretext for giving us a chance for a private conversation, she stopped as she cast on me one of those glances which only women can give. There was in her look all the curiosity allowed to a mistress of a house who receives a stranger coming unexpectedly to her, as if fallen from the clouds; there were all the questionings that my garb called for, as well as my youth and countenance,—what strange contrasts!—then all the disdain of a mistress who is idolized and in whose eyes men are nothing, except a single one; there were involuntary fears, dread, and the tedium of having an unexpected guest, when, no doubt, she had just prepared for her love all the happiness of solitude. I understood that mute eloquence, and I answered it with a sad smile full of pity and compassion. Then I contemplated her for a moment in all the splendor of her beauty, on a fine day, in the middle of a narrow alley bordered

with flowers. On seeing that admirable picture I could not refrain from heaving a sigh.

"Alas! madame, I have just made a very painful journey, undertaken—for you only."

"Monsieur!" she said to me.

"Oh!" I continued, "I come in the name of him who calls you Juliette."

She grew pale.

"You will not see him to-day."

"Is he ill?" she said in a low voice.

"Yes," I replied to her. "But, I pray you, be calm—I have been charged by him to entrust to you some secrets that concern you, and believe me that never will messenger be more discreet or more devoted."

"What is the matter?"

"Suppose he no longer loved you?"

"Oh! that is impossible!" she exclaimed as a slight smile escaped her, that expressed her thoughts openly.

Suddenly she had a sort of shivering, cast a wild and hurried glance on me, blushed and said:

"He is alive?"

Great God! what a terrible word! I was too young to bear its tone, I did not answer, and looked at that unfortunate woman with a stupefied air.

"Monsieur, monsieur, an answer!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, madame."

"Is that true? Oh! tell me the truth, I can bear it. Tell! Any sorrow will be less poignant to me than is my suspense."

I answered with two tears wrung from me by the strange accents with which these phrases were accompanied.

She leaned against a tree and uttered a feeble cry.

"Madame," I said to her, "here comes your husband!"

"Have I a husband?"

On saying this she fled and disappeared.

"Well, dinner is getting cold," the count exclaimed. "Come, monsieur."

Thereupon I followed the master of the house, who led me into a dining-room, where I saw a repast served with all the splendor to which Parisian tables have accustomed us. There were five covers: those of the two spouses and that of the little girl; *mine*, which was to have been *his;* the last was that of a canon of Saint-Denis who, grace having been said, asked:

"Where, then, is our dear countess?"

"Oh! she is coming," replied the count, who, after having hurriedly served us with the soup, gave himself quite an ample plate of it and got away with it in a marvelously short time.

"Oh! nephew," the canon exclaimed, "if your wife were here you would be more discreet."

"Papa will make himself sick," the little girl exclaimed in a mischievous tone.

A moment after this singular gastronomic episode, and just as the count was hurriedly carving an uncertain piece of venison, a chambermaid came in and said:

"Monsieur, we cannot find madame!"

At these words I arose instantly, fearing some misfortune, and my countenance so keenly expressed my fears that the old canon followed me to the garden. The husband came from decency as far as the threshold.

"Stay! stay! you need have no fear," he called out to us.

But he did not accompany us. The canon, the chambermaid and myself scoured the paths and grassplots of the park, calling, listening, and so much the more uneasy as I told of the young viscount's death. While running I related the circumstances of that fatal event, and observed that the chambermaid was extremely attached to her mistress, for she entered quite as much as the canon into the secrets of my dread. We went to the ponds, we visited every spot without finding the countess, or the faintest trace of her course. At last, on returning along a wall, I heard dull and deeply smothered groans that seemed to come from a sort of barn. At all hazards I entered it. There we discovered Juliette, who, moved by the instinct of despair, had there buried herself amid the hay. She had covered her head so as to deaden her horrible cries, in obedience to an invincible shame: they were the sobs and tears of a child, but more penetrating, more plaintive. There was nothing more in the world for her. The chambermaid freed her mistress, who allowed this to be done with the languid indifference of a dying animal. This girl

knew not what else to say but: "Come, madame, come."

The old canon asked:

"But what ails her? What is the matter with you, niece?"

At last, aided by the chambermaid, I brought Juliette to her room; I carefully gave instructions to watch over her and to tell everybody that the countess had a sick headache. Then we came down again, the canon and I, to the dining-room. Some time had already elapsed since we had left the count, I hardly thought of him but at the moment when I found myself under the peristyle; his indifference surprised me, but my astonishment increased when I found him philosophically seated at table: he had eaten almost the whole dinner, to the great delight of his daughter, who smiled at seeing her father flagrantly disobeying the countess's orders. That husband's strange indifference was explained to me by the slight altercation that arose suddenly between the canon and him. The count was subjected to a severe diet that the doctors had imposed on him to heal him of a serious malady, the name of which has escaped me; and, impelled by that ferocious gluttony rather common to convalescents, the appetite of the beast had in him gained the upper hand over all the sensibilities of the man. In a moment I had seen nature in all its truth, under two very different aspects which brought the comical into the very heart of the most dreadful sorrow. The evening was a sad one. I was tired. The

canon used all his intelligence to find out the cause of his niece's tears. The husband digested in silence, after having been satisfied with a rather vague explanation that the countess had given him of her illness through her chambermaid, and which was, I believe, borrowed from the indispositions natural to woman. We all went to bed early. As I passed by the countess's room on going to my resting-place whither a valet was showing me the way, I timidly asked for news about her. Recognizing my voice, she insisted on my going in, she wanted to speak to me; but, not being able to articulate anything, she bowed her head and I retired. In spite of the cruel emotions that I had shared with the good faith of a young man, I slept, overcome by the fatigue of a forced march. At a late hour of the night I was awakened by the sharp rattling made by the rings of my curtains violently drawn on their iron rod. I saw the countess seated on the foot of my bed. Her countenance received all the light from a lamp placed on my table.

"Is it still quite true, monsieur?" she said to me. "I do not know how I can live after the terrible blow that has just struck me; but at this moment I feel calm. I want to learn all."

"How calm!" I said to myself on noticing the frightful paleness of her complexion, which made a contrast with the brown color of her hair, on hearing the guttural sounds of her voice, on remaining stunned by the ravages clearly shown in all her altered features.

She was already blanched like a woman robbed of the last tints that autumn impresses on her. Her red and swollen eyes, devoid of all their beauties, reflected only a bitter and profound sorrow: you would have said it was but a gray cloud, where so lately the sun had glistened.

I repeated simply, without dwelling too much on certain circumstances too painful for her, the rapid event that had robbed her of her friend. I told her of the first day of our journey, so filled up with the memories of their love. She did not weep, she listened with avidity, her head bent towards me, like a zealous physician diagnosing a disease. Taking advantage of a moment when she appeared to me to have entirely opened her heart to sufferings and to want to plunge into her misfortune with all the ardor given by the first fever of despair, I spoke to her of the fears that agitated the poor dying youth, and told her how and why he had entrusted me with this fatal errand. Her eyes were then dried by the dark fire that escaped from the deepest regions of her soul. She was able to grow still paler. When I offered to her the letters that I had kept under my pillow, she took them mechanically; then she trembled violently, and said to me in a hollow voice:

"And I who burned his! I have nothing from him! nothing! nothing!"

She struck her forehead vehemently.

"Madame—" I said to her.

She looked at me with a convulsive movement.

"I cut from his head," I said continuing, "this lock of hair."

And I presented to her this last, this incorruptible fragment of him whom she loved. Ah! if you had received as I did the scalding tears that then fell on my hands, you would know what gratitude is when it is so akin to kindness! She clasped my hands, and, with a choking voice, with a look bright as if from fever, a look in which her frail happiness radiated through terrible sufferings:

"Ah! you love!" she said. "Be always happy! do not lose her who is dear to you!"

She did not finish, but fled with her treasure.

Next day this nocturnal scene, confounded with my dreams, seemed to me to be a fiction. To convince myself of the painful truth I had to make a fruitless search for the letters under my bolster. It would be useless to narrate to you the events of the morrow. I remained some hours longer with the Juliette of whom my poor traveling companion had boasted so much. The slightest words, gestures and actions of that woman proved to me the nobility of soul, the delicacy of feeling, that made of her one of those darling creatures of love and devotedness so rarely scattered over this earth. Towards evening the Comte de Montpersan, himself, took me to Moulins. On arriving there he said to me in a somewhat embarrassed way:

"Monsieur, if it is not abusing your complacency, and acting rather indiscreetly with an unknown person to whom we are already under obligations,

would you be so kind as to take to Paris, since you are going there, to Monsieur de —— (I have forgotten the name), Rue de Sentier, a sum that I owe him, and that he has asked me to send him at once?"

"With pleasure, monsieur."

And, in the innocence of my soul, I took a roll of twenty-five louis, which served me to get back to Paris, and which I gave faithfully to Monsieur de Montpersan's pretended correspondent.

In Paris only, and on taking this sum to the house indicated, I learned of the ingenious adroitness with which Juliette had served me. Did not the way in which this gold was given to me, the discretion observed in regard to a poverty easily guessed at, fully reveal the genius of a loving woman?

What a delight to have been able to relate this adventure to a woman who, in fear, has pressed your hands, and has said to you: "Oh! dear, do not die, not you!"

Paris, January, 1832.

THE ATHEIST'S MASS

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In the Virgin's chapel, in front of whose altar he heard a Mass.

DESPLEIN IN SAINT-SULPICE

*Bianchon stole into Saint-Sulpice, and was more than a little astonished at seeing the great Desplein, that atheist who had no pity for the angels, * * * that intrepid* derider, *humbly kneeling, and where?— In the Virgin's chapel, in front of whose altar he heard a Mass.*

THIS IS DEDICATED TO AUGUSTE BORGET

By his friend,

DE BALZAC.

THE ATHEIST'S MASS

*

A physician to whom science owes a plausible theory in physiology, and who, while still young took rank among the celebrities of the École de Paris, that centre of light to which the physicians of Europe all pay homage, Doctor Bianchon practised surgery long before devoting himself to medicine. His early studies were directed by one of the greatest of French surgeons, by the illustrious Desplein, who passed like a meteor in science. Even his enemies admit that an untransmittable method was buried in his tomb. Like all men of genius, he was without successor: he brought and carried off all with him. The glory of surgeons is like that of actors, who exist only in their lifetime and whose talent is no longer appreciable once they have disappeared. Actors and surgeons, like great singers also, like virtuosi, who, by their execution, increase tenfold the power of music, are all heroes of the moment. Desplein furnishes the proof of this similarity between the destiny of these transitory geniuses. His name, so famous yesterday, today almost forgotten, will remain in his specialty,

but never cross its borders. But are not unheard-of circumstances needed for the name of a scholar to pass from the domain of Science into the general history of Humanity? Did Desplein have that universality of knowledge which makes of a man the *word* or the *figure* of an age? Desplein was supreme in taking in at a glance: he penetrated both the patient and his malady with either an acquired or a natural intuition that enabled him to grasp indications peculiar to the individual, to determine the precise moment, the hour, the minute at which it was necessary to operate, by taking into account the atmospheric circumstances and the peculiarities of temperament. To be able to walk thus hand in hand with nature, had he studied, then, the incessant junction of beings and of the elementary substances contained in the atmosphere or that the earth furnishes to the man who absorbs them and prepares them for the extracting therefrom of a special expression? Did he proceed by that power of deduction and analogy to which Cuvier's genius is due? However this may be, that man had made himself the confidant of the flesh, he grasped it in the past as well as in the future, placing his dependence on the present. But did he sum up the whole of science in his person, as did Hippocrates, Galen and Aristotle? Did he lead a whole school towards new worlds? No. If it be impossible to deny to that perpetual observer of human chemistry the ancient science of magianism, that is, the knowledge of principles in fusion, the causes of life, life before

life, what it will be from its preparations before being, it must be acknowledged that, unfortunately, everything in him was personal: isolated in his life by egoism, egoism to-day commits suicide on his glory. His tomb is not surmounted by the sonorous statue that repeats to the future, the mysteries which genius is looking for at his expense. But perhaps Desplein's talent was inseparable from his beliefs, and consequently mortal. To him the terrestrial atmosphere was a generating cell; he regarded the earth as an egg in its shell, and being unable to find out whether it was the egg or the chicken that was first, he admitted neither the cock nor the egg. He believed neither in the animal anterior nor in the spirit posterior to man. Desplein was not in doubt, he affirmed. His pure and frank atheism resembled that of many scholars, the best people in the world, but invincibly atheists, atheists such as religious people hold there cannot be. This opinion could not be otherwise in the case of a man accustomed from his youth to dissecting the being par excellence, before, during, and after life, to prying into it in all its apparatus without finding there that one soul, so necessary to religious theories. Recognizing in it a cerebral centre, a nervous centre and an aërosanguine centre, the first two of which supplanted each other so well, that in the later days of his life he was convinced that the sense of hearing was not absolutely necessary in order to hear, nor the sense of sight absolutely required in order to see, and that the solar plexus replaced them beyond a doubt;

Desplein, on finding two souls in man, corroborated his atheism with this fact, though he as yet did not prejudicate in regard to God. That man died, it is said, in the final impenitence in which, unfortunately, die many fine geniuses whom God might pardon.

That man's life, great as he was, had in it many petty things, to use the expression employed by his enemies, who were anxious to belittle his glory, but which it would be more accurate to call apparent contradictions. Never having had cognizance of the conclusions from which superior minds act, the envious or the narrow-minded at once arm themselves with some superficial contradictions, to draw up a bill of indictment on which they have them momentarily judged. If, later on, success crowns the combinations that are attacked, by showing the correlation between preparations and results, there always remains a little of the advance calumnies. Thus, in our own day, Napoléon was condemned by our contemporaries when he unfolded his eagle's wings over England: 1822 was needed to explain 1804 and the flat-boats of Boulogne.

With Desplein, glory and science being beyond attack, his enemies found fault with his strange temperament and his character; while he merely had that quality which the English call *eccentricity*. Sometimes, superbly clad like the tragic writer Crébillon, he suddenly affected a strange indifference in the matter of garb; he was sometimes seen in a carriage, sometimes on foot. In turn

brusque and good, in appearance harsh and stingy, but capable of offering his means to his exiled masters who did him the honor of accepting them for some days, no man occasioned more contradictory opinions. Though capable, so as to have a black cord that physicians would not have had to solicit, letting a copy of the *Horæ Diurnæ* fall from his pocket at court, just think of it, he mocked at all this within himself; he held men in profound contempt, after having observed them from above and from below, after having taken them by surprise in their true character, in the midst of the most solemn and the most ignoble of the acts of existence. With a great man, qualities are often inseparable. If, among these colossi, one of them has more talent than wit, his wit is still more extensive than that of him of whom it is simply said: "He has wit." All genius supposes a moral view. This view may be applied to any specialty whatever; but whoever sees the flower, ought to see the sun. He who heard a diplomatist, who had been saved by him, asking: "How goes the Emperor?" and who answered: "The courtier is returning, the man will follow!" that man is not only a surgeon or a physician, he is also prodigiously witty. So the patient and assiduous observer of mankind will legitimatize Desplein's exorbitant pretensions, and regard him, as he regarded himself, fit to make as great a minister as he was a surgeon.

From among the enigmas which Desplein's life presented to several of his contemporaries, we have

chosen one of the most interesting, because the key to it will be found at the close of the narrative, and will defend it against some stupid accusations.

Of all the students whom Desplein had at his hospital, Horace Bianchon was one of those to whom he was most warmly attached. Before being house surgeon at the Hôtel-Dieu, Horace Bianchon had been a student in medicine, living in a wretched boarding-house in the Latin quarter which bore the name of *Maison Vauquer*. This poor young man there felt the pangs of that dire poverty, a sort of crucible from which great talent must come out pure and incorruptible as diamonds, that can be subjected to all sorts of shocks without being broken. In the raging fire of their unchained passions they acquire the staunchest probity, and contract the habit of struggling, that awaits genius in the constant work to which they have confined their cheated appetites. Horace was an upright young man, incapable of shuffling in questions of honor, getting to the point without circumlocution, ready to pledge his cloak for his friends, as well as to give them his time and his vigils. Horace was, in fine, one of those friends who are not disturbed about what they receive in exchange for what they give, certain of receiving in return more than they may bestow. Most of his friends had for him that internal respect inspired by modest virtue, and several of them dreaded his censure. But these qualities Horace displayed unpedantically. Neither a Puritan nor a sermonizer, he swore genteelly while giving advice,

and readily *made one of a merry party* when occasion offered. A jolly companion, no more a prude than is a cuirassier, a downright plain man, not exactly like a marine, for the marine of to-day is a shrewd diplomatist, but like a fine young man who has nothing to disguise in his life, he went along with a high head and pleasant thoughts. In fine, to express everything in a word, Horace was a combination of Pylades and Orestes, creditors being taken nowadays as the most real figure of the ancient Furies. He bore his poverty with that gaiety which perhaps is one of the chief elements of courage, and, like all those who have nothing, he contracted few debts. Sober as a camel, alert as a stag, he was firm in his ideas and in his conduct. Bianchon's happy life began from the day when the illustrious surgeon acquired proof of the qualities and defects which, equally, make Doctor Horace Bianchon doubly dear to his friends. When a clinic director takes a young man on his lap, that young man, as the saying is, has his foot in the stirrup. Desplein did not fail to take Bianchon to assist him in rich houses, where nearly always some honorarium fell into the student-boarder's purse, and where were gradually revealed to the provincial the mysteries of Parisian life; he kept him in his office during his consultations, and made use of him there; sometimes he sent him to accompany a rich patient to the springs; in fine, he prepared a practice for him. As a result of this, after a certain time, the tyrant of surgery had a most devoted

follower. These two men, one at the pinnacle of honor and his profession, enjoying immense wealth and immense glory, the other, a modest omega, having neither means nor glory, became fast friends. The great Desplein told his student-boarder everything; the student knew whether such a woman sat on a chair near the master, or on the famous settee that was in the office and on which Desplein slept: Bianchon knew the mysteries of that lion and bull temperament which at last enlarged and amplified beyond measure the bust of the great man and caused his death from heart development. He studied the oddities of that life so busy, the plans of that avarice so sordid, the hopes of the politician, hidden in the scholar; he could foresee the disappointments that awaited the only feeling buried in that heart that was less bronze than bronzed.

One day Bianchon said to Desplein that a poor water-carrier of the Saint-Jacques quarter had a dreadful malady due to fatigue and poverty; that poor Auvergnat had eaten only potatoes during the whole winter of 1821. Desplein left all his patients. At the risk of killing his horse he flew, followed by Bianchon, to the poor man's home and had him transferred, himself, to a sanitarium established by the famous Dubois in the Faubourg Saint-Denis. He went to take care of this man, to whom, when he had cured him, he gave the sum necessary to buy a horse and tank-cart. That Auvergnat distinguished himself by an original trait. One of his

friends fell sick, he brought him at once to Desplein, saying to his benefactor:

"I would not have allowed him to go to anyone else."

Surly as he was, Desplein pressed the water-carrier's hand and said to him:

"Bring them all to me."

And he had the Le Cantal youth admitted to the Hôtel-Dieu, where he took the greatest care of him. Bianchon had on several occasions already remarked in his chief a predilection for Auvergnats and especially for water-carriers; but, as Desplein took a sort of pride in his Hôtel-Dieu treatments, the pupil saw nothing very strange in that.

One day, while crossing the Place Saint-Sulpice, Bianchon saw his master entering the church about nine o'clock in the morning. Desplein, who never went a step at that time without his cab, was on foot, and was slipping in by the door of the Rue du Petit-Lion, as if he were entering a house of doubtful character. Naturally seized with curiosity, the student-boarder, who knew his master's opinions and who was an *adept* in dyablerie with a y—which seems in Rabelais to be a superior sort of diablerie, —Bianchon stole into Saint-Sulpice, and was more than a little astonished at seeing the great Desplein, that atheist who had no pity for the angels, who give no opportunity to ply the scalpel, and cannot have fistula or gastritis, in fine, that intrepid *derider*, humbly kneeling, and where?—In the Virgin's chapel, in front of whose altar he heard a Mass,

contributed to the expense of the service, gave to the poor, while remaining as serious as if there were question of an operation.

"He certainly has not come to get enlightened on questions bearing on the Virgin's confinement," Bianchon said to himself, while seized with unbounded astonishment. "If I had seen him holding, on the feast of Corpus Christi, one of the cords of the canopy, there would be nothing to do but laugh; but, at this hour, alone, without witnesses, there is certainly something to think about in this!"

Bianchon did not want to appear as if spying on the chief surgeon of the Hôtel-Dieu, and so he left. By chance Desplein invited him that very day to dine out with him, at a restaurant. Between the fruit and the cheese Bianchon came, after skilful preparations, to speak of the Mass, characterizing it as mummery and farce.

"A farce," said Desplein, "that has cost Christianity more blood than all of Napoléon's battles and all of Broussais' leeches! The Mass is a Papal invention that does not go back any farther than the sixth century and that was based on the *hoc est corpus*. What torrents of blood has it not been necessary to shed in order to establish the feast of Corpus Christi, by the institution of which the court of Rome wanted to show its victory in the matter of the Real Presence, a schism which, for three centuries, troubled the Church! The wars of the Comte de Toulouse and the Albigenses are the

tail end of this affair. The Waldenses and the Albigenses refused to acknowledge this innovation."

In fine, Desplein took pleasure in giving himself up to his atheistic whim, and it was a flux of Voltairean pleasantries, or, to be more correct, a detestable counterfeit of the *Citateur*.

"Oh! dear!" Bianchon said to himself, "where is my devotee of this morning?"

He kept silent, he doubted that he had seen his chief in Saint-Sulpice. Desplein would not have taken the trouble to lie to Bianchon: both of them knew each other too well, they had already, on points quite as serious, exchanged views, discussed systems *de natura rerum* by sounding them or dissecting them with the knives and the scalpel of incredulity. Three months passed. Bianchon did not follow up that fact, though it remained engraven in his memory. In that year, one day, one of the physicians of the Hôtel-Dieu took Desplein by the arm in Bianchon's presence, as if to interrogate him.

"What, then, did you go to Saint-Sulpice to do, my dear master?" he said to him.

"To see a priest there, who has caries of the knee, and whom the Duchesse d'Angoulême did me the honor to recommend to me," said Desplein.

The physician was satisfied with this defeat, but not Bianchon.

"Ah! he goes to see diseased knees in church! He went to hear his Mass," the student-boarder said to himself.

Bianchon made up his mind to lie in wait for

Desplein; he remembered the day and the hour when he had unexpectedly found him entering Saint-Sulpice, and resolved to go there the following year, on the same day and at the same hour, so as to find out if he would catch him there again. In that case the regularity of his devotion would call for a scientific investigation, for one must not expect to find in such a man a direct contradiction between thought and action. The following year, on the day and at the hour aforesaid, Bianchon, who was no longer Desplein's student-boarder, saw the surgeon's cab stop at the corner of the Rue de Tournon and the Rue du Petit-Lion, whence his friend went jesuitically along the walls to Saint-Sulpice, where he again heard his Mass at the Virgin's altar. It was Desplein indeed! the surgeon-in-chief, the atheist *in petto,* the devotee by chance. The plot was thickening. This illustrious scholar's persistence was complicating everything. When Desplein had left, Bianchon approached the sacristan who came to see to the chapel, and asked him if that gentleman was a regular.

"For twenty years have I been here," said the sacristan, "and in that time Monsieur Desplein has come four times a year to hear this Mass; he founded it."

"A foundation made by him!" said Bianchon, as he left. "That is worth the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, a thing which, of itself alone, should make a physician an unbeliever."

Some time passed before Doctor Bianchon, though

Desplein's friend, was in a position to speak to him of that special incident in his life. If they met in consultation or in the world, it was difficult to find that moment of confidence and solitude when one remains with his feet on the fender and his head resting on the back of an armchair, and during which two men tell each other their secrets. At last, seven years later, after the Revolution of 1830, when the people rushed on the Archbishop's Palace, when their republican inspirations drove them to destroy the gilded crosses that beamed, like flashes of lightning, in the immensity of that ocean of houses; when Unbelief, side by side with Riot, stalked in the streets, Bianchon again caught Desplein entering Saint-Sulpice. The doctor followed him thither, took his station near him, without his friend making him the least sign or showing the least surprise. Both heard the memorial Mass.

"Will you tell me, my dear friend," said Bianchon to Desplein after they had left the church, "the reason for your *capucinade?* I have already entrapped you three times going to Mass, yes, you! You will set me right on this mystery, and explain to me this flagrant disagreement between your opinions and your conduct. You do not believe in God, and you go to Mass! My dear master, you are bound to answer me."

"I am like many devotees, men profoundly religious in appearance, but as much atheists as we, you and I, can be."

And then followed a torrent of epigrams on some

political personages, the best known of whom gives us in this age a new edition of Molière's *Tartufe*.

"I do not ask all that of you," said Bianchon; "I want to know the reason for what you have just done here, why you founded this Mass."

"Faith, my dear friend," said Desplein, "I am on the edge of the grave, I may well speak to you of the beginnings of my life."

Just then Bianchon and the great man found themselves in the Rue des Quatre-Vents, one of the most horrible streets in Paris. Desplein pointed to the seventh story of one of those houses that resemble an obelisk, the mongrel door of which opens on an alley at the end of which is a tortuous stairway lighted by windows justly called *borrowed lights*. It was a greenish house, on the ground floor of which lived a furniture dealer, and which appeared to lodge on each of its stories a different form of poverty. On raising his arm, with a motion full of energy, Desplein said to Bianchon:

"I lived up there for two years!"

"I know it, D'Arthez lived there, I came almost every day during my early youth, we then called it the *great men's den!* After that?"

"The Mass that I have just heard is connected with events which took place at the time when I dwelt in the mansard in which you tell me D'Arthez lived, that from the window of which floats a line loaded with linen above a flower-pot. I had such rough beginnings, my dear Bianchon, that I can dispute the palm of Parisian sufferings with anyone

whomsoever. I suffered in every respect: hunger, thirst, want of money, want of clothes, footwear and linen, all that is most miserable in poverty. I blew on my benumbed fingers in that *great men's den*, which I would like to go and see again with you. I worked during a winter when my head reeked with vapor, and I could observe my breath as we see that of horses on a frosty day. I do not know whence one derives his fulcrum to bear up against that life. I was alone, unaided, without a sou either to buy books or to pay the expenses of my medical education; without a friend: my irascible, gloomy, restless character injured me. No one wanted to see in my irritations the uneasiness and work of a man who, from the bottom of the social scale from which he has come, stirs himself to reach the surface. But I had, I can tell you, you before whom I do not need to hide myself, I had that groundwork of good feelings and keen sensibility which will always be the appanage of men strong enough to clamber to any summit, after having picked one's steps in the marshes of poverty. I could not get anything from my family nor from my country, beyond the insufficient allowance for schooling that was made to me. In fine, at that time I ate in the morning a small loaf which the baker in the Rue du Petit-Lion sold to me at a reduced price because it was a day and sometimes two days old, and I steeped it in milk: my morning repast thus cost me only two sous. I dined only every second day in a boarding-house where dinner

cost sixteen sous. Thus I spent only nine sous a day. You know as well as I do what care I must have taken of my clothes and foot-wear! I do not know whether later on we experience as much grief from a fellow-man's treason as we have experienced, you as well as I, on perceiving the laughing grimace of a shoe that is ripped, on hearing the cuff of an overcoat give way. I drank only water, I had the greatest respect for cafés. Zoppi seemed to me like a promised land where the Luculli of the Latin country alone had the right to be present. 'Would I ever be able!' I said to myself, 'there to take a cup of coffee with cream, there to play a hand at dominoes?' In fine, I brought to my labors, the zeal with which poverty inspired me. I tried to secure positive knowledge so as to have an immense personal value, to merit the place at which I would arrive on the day when I would have emerged from my nothingness. I consumed more oil than bread: the light that enlightened me during those nights of perseverance cost me more than my nourishment. That duel was long, obstinate, without consolation. I awakened no sympathy around me. To have friends, is it not necessary to form attachments with young folks, to have a few sous so as to go and tipple with them, to go together wherever students go? I had nothing! And nobody in Paris pictures to himself that *nothing* is *nothing*. When it was necessary to disclose my poverty, I felt in the throat that nervous contraction which makes our patients believe that a ball is rising from the

œsophagus into the larynx. Later on I met some of those folks, born rich, who, having never wanted anything, do not know the problem of this rule of three: *A young man is to crime as a hundred-sou piece is to x.* These gilded imbeciles say to me:

"'Why, then, did you run into debt? why, then, did you contract onerous obligations?'

"They remind me of that princess, who, knowing that the people wanted bread, said: 'Why don't they buy cake?' I would like to see the one of those rich folks who complains that I charge him too much when it is necessary to operate on him, yes, I would like to see him alone in Paris, without a cent, without a friend, without credit, and forced to work with his five fingers for a living! What would he do? Whither would he go to appease his hunger? Bianchon, if you have seen me sometimes sour and obdurate, I then superimpose my first sorrows on insensibility, on egoism, of which I have had thousands of proofs in the upper spheres; or rather I thought of the obstacles that hatred, envy, jealousy, calumny, raised between success and me. In Paris, when certain people see you ready to put your foot in the stirrup, some take you by the flap of your coat, others loosen the buckle of the girth so that you may fracture your skull in falling; the one unshoes your horse, the other steals your whip: the less traitorous is he whom you see coming to shoot you with a pistol at short range. You have enough talent, my dear boy, to know ere long of the horrible, incessant battle that mediocrity wages on the

superior man. If you lose twenty-five louis of an evening, next day you will be accused of being a gambler, and your best friends will say that last night you lost twenty-five thousand francs. Have a headache, you will pass for a madman. Be lively, you will be unsociable. If, to resist that battalion of pygmies, you summon up in yourself superior strength, your best friends will exclaim that you want to devour everything, that you pretend to domineer, to tyrannize. In fine, your qualities will become defects, your defects will become vices, and your virtues will be crimes. If you have saved anyone, you will have killed him; if your patient reappears, you will constantly hear that you will have made sure of the present at the expense of the future; if he is not dead, he will die. Stumble, you will have fallen! Invent anything you may, claim your rights, you will be a troublesome man, a shrewd man, who is not willing that young men shall succeed. So, my dear friend, if I do not believe in God, I believe still less in man. Do you not recognize in me a Desplein entirely different from the Desplein of whom everyone thinks? But let us not delve into this mass of mud. Well, I lived in that house, I had to work so as to be able to pass my first examination, and I had not a farthing. You know! I had reached one of those last extremities when one says to himself: 'I will run into debt!' I had a hope. I was expecting from my province a trunk full of linen, a present from those old aunts who, knowing nothing of Paris,

think of your shirts, imagining that with thirty francs a month their nephew eats ortolans. The trunk arrived while I was at the École: it had cost forty francs for freight; the porter, a German shoemaker lodged in a loft, had paid for them and kept the trunk. I walked along the Rue des Fossés-Saint-Germain-des-Prés and the Rue de l'École-de-Médecine without being able to invent a stratagem that would give me my trunk without being obliged to pay the forty francs, that naturally I would have paid after having sold the linen. My stupidity made me surmise that I had no other vocation than surgery. My dear boy, delicate souls, whose strength is exercised in an elevated sphere, lack that spirit of intrigue, fertile in resources, in combinations; their genius, for them, is chance: they do not seek, they meet.

"In fine, I returned at night, just as my neighbor was coming home, a water-carrier named Bourgeat, a man from Saint-Flour. We knew each other as two tenants know each other, who have each his room on the same landing, who hear each other sleeping, coughing, dressing, and who at last become accustomed to each other. My neighbor told me that the landlord, to whom I owed three terms, had turned me out: I would have to quit next day. He himself was driven away because of his profession. I spent the saddest night of my life. Where get an expressman to take away my poor household effects, my books? How pay the expressman and the porter? Where was I to go? These unanswerable

questions I repeated in tears, as madmen repeat their refrains. I slept. Poverty has for itself a heaven-born sleep full of beautiful dreams. Next morning, just as I was eating my porringer of bread moistened in my milk, Bourgeat entered and said to me in bad French:

"'Mishter shtudent, I be a poor man, a pick-up of the Shaint-Flour hospital, wit no fader or moder, and be not so rich to marry. You be no more rich in relations, and haven't what I count on? Listen, I have down there a hand-cart as I rent for two shous the hour, all our traps can go in it; if you like, we will look for lodging together, as we be chased from here. After all, it's no heaven on earth here.'

"'I know it well, my good Bourgeat,' I said to him. 'But I am greatly embarrassed: I have down there a trunk that contains a hundred crowns' worth of linen, with which I could pay the landlord and what I owe the porter, and I have not a hundred sous.'

"'Bah! I've some moneys,' Bourgeat answered joyously as he showed me an old dirty leather purse. 'Keep your linen.'

"Bourgeat paid my three terms, his own, and settled with the porter. Then he put our furniture and my linen in his cart, and drew it through the streets, stopping in front of each house on which a notice hung. On my part, I went up to see whether the lodging for rent would suit. At noon we were still wandering in the Latin quarter without

having found anything there. The price was a great obstacle. Bourgeat proposed to me to have breakfast at a wine dealer's, at whose door we left the cart. Toward evening I discovered in the Cour de Rohan, Passage du Commerce, at the top of a house, next to the roof, two rooms separated by the stairway. We got them each for sixty francs a year. Here we are housed, I and my humble friend. We dined together. Bourgeat, who made about fifty sous a day, had about a hundred crowns, he was soon going to be able to realize his ambition by buying a tank-cart and a horse. On learning of my situation, for he drew my secrets from me with an artful depth and a good-nature the memory of which even now stirs my heart, he gave up for a time the ambition of his whole life: Bourgeat was a dealer on the street for twenty-two years, he sacrificed his hundred crowns to my future."

Here Desplein violently pressed Bianchon's arm.

"He gave me the money necessary for my examinations! That man, my friend, understood that I had a mission, that the requirements of my intellect exceeded his own. He was interested in me, he called me his *little fellow,* he loaned me the money necessary to buy my books, he came sometimes very softly to see me working; in fine, he took the precautions of a mother to get me to substitute for the insufficient and poor diet, to which I had been reduced, healthy and abundant food. Bourgeat, a man about forty years old, had a mediæval burgher countenance, an arched forehead,

a head that a painter might have made to pose as a model for a Lycurgus. The poor man felt his heart big with affections to bestow; he had never been loved but by a poodle that had died a short time before, and of which he always spoke to me, asking me if I thought the Church would consent to having Masses said for the repose of its soul. His dog, he said, was a true Christian, that, for twelve years, had accompanied him to Church without having ever barked, listening to the organ without opening its mouth, and staying crouched near him, with a mien which made him believe that it was praying with him. That man transferred all his affections to me: he took me as a lone and suffering being; he became to me as a most attentive mother, a most delicate benefactor, in fine, the ideal of that virtue which takes pleasure in its work. When I met him in the street, he cast on me a look of intelligence full of inconceivable nobility: he then affected to walk as if he were carrying nothing, he seemed happy at seeing me in good health and well-clad. It was, in fine, the devotedness of the people, the love of the grisette transferred to an elevated sphere. Bourgeat attended to my errands, he woke me up during the night at fixed hours, he cleaned my lamp, he scrubbed our landing; as good a house-servant as he was a father, and as cleanly as an English girl. He attended to the housekeeping. Like Philopœmen, he sawed our wood, and gave to all his actions the simplicity of practice, at the same time preserving his dignity, for he

seemed to understand that the end ennobled everything. When I left that fine fellow to enter the Hôtel-Dieu as a house-surgeon he felt an indescribably gloomy grief, thinking that he could no longer live without me; but he consoled himself with the prospect of amassing the money necessary for the expenses of my thesis, and he made me promise to come and see him on outing days. Bourgeat was proud of me, he loved me on my own account and his. If you look up my thesis, you will see that it is dedicated to him. In the last year of my residence, I had saved up enough money to pay back all that I owed to that worthy Auvergnat, by buying a horse and tank-cart for him; he was exceedingly angry when he knew that I deprived myself of my money, and yet he was delighted at seeing his wishes realized; he laughed and scolded me, he looked at his tank and his horse, and wiped away a tear as he said to me:

"'That's bad! Ah! what a fine tank! You were wrong—The horse is as strong as an Auvergnat.'

"I have seen nothing more touching than that scene. Bourgeat wanted absolutely to buy for me that instrument case finished in silver which you have seen in my office, and which to me is the most precious thing in it. Though overcome with delight at my early success, he never showed the slightest sign, by word or gesture, that would mean: 'I made that man!' And yet, without him, poverty would have killed me. The poor man had worn himself out for me: he had eaten only bread

rubbed in garlic, so that I might have enough coffee to keep me awake. He fell sick. As you may imagine, I spent nights at his bedside, I pulled him through the first time; but he had a relapse two years later, and, in spite of the most assiduous care, in spite of the greatest efforts of science, he had to succumb. Never was king better cared for than he. Yes, Bianchon, I tried unheard-of things in order to snatch that life from death. I wanted to have him live long enough to make him witness his work, to realize his wishes, to satisfy the only gratitude that has filled my heart, to extinguish a fire that is burning me even now!

"Bourgeat," continued Desplein after a pause, with visible emotion, "my second father died in my arms, leaving me all that he owned by a will that he had made at a public scrivener's, and bearing date of the year in which we had come to lodge in the Cour de Rohan. That man had the faith of a charcoal man. He loved the Blessed Virgin as he would have loved his wife. Though an ardent Catholic, he had never said a word to me about my irreligion. When he was in danger, he entreated me to spare no pains that he might have the assistance of the Church. I had Mass said for him every day. Often during the night he told me he had fears for his future, he was afraid he had not lived a sufficiently holy life. The poor man! He worked from morning until evening. To whom, then, should Paradise belong, if there be a Paradise? He received the last rites like a saint that he

was, and his death was worthy of his life. His funeral was attended only by myself. When I had put my only benefactor under the sod, I inquired how I should pay my indebtedness to him; I saw that he had neither family, nor friends, nor wife, nor children. But he believed! He had a religious conviction, had I the right to dispute it? He had timidly spoken to me of Masses said for the repose of the dead, he did not want to impose this duty on me, thinking that it would be enforcing payment for his services. As soon as I was able to endow a foundation, I gave to Saint-Sulpice the sum necessary to have four Masses a year said there. As the only thing that I can offer to Bourgeat is the satisfying of his pious wishes, the day on which that Mass is said, at the beginning of each season, I go in his name and recite for him the desired prayers. I say with the good faith of the doubter: 'O God, if there is a sphere in which are put after their death those who have been perfect, think of good Bourgeat; and if there is anything to be suffered on his account, give me his sufferings, so that he may gain admittance the more speedily into what people call Paradise.' That, my dear fellow, is all that a man holding my opinions can do. Were God but a good devil, He would not bear me ill-will for it. I swear to you that I would give all I am worth to have Bourgeat's faith enter my head."

Bianchon, who attended Desplein in his last illness, dares not now assert that the famous surgeon died an atheist. Will not believers like to think of

the humble Auvergnat coming to open the gate of Heaven to him, as he of old opened the gate of the terrestrial temple on whose façade we read: *Aux grands hommes la patrie reconnaissante*—a grateful country to its great men—?

Paris, January, 1836.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

PIERROTIN PRESENTED TO MME. CLAPART
Etching . . *Fronts.*

PIERROTIN AND DE SÉRIZY'S VALET 32

THE COUNT DE SÉRIZY OVERHEARS 112

THE COUNTESS AT MY BED 289

DESPLEIN IN SAINT-SULPICE 313

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Balzac, Honore de.
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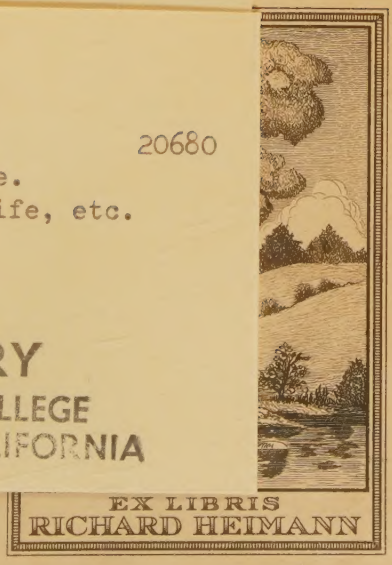
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